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***THE FLIGHT FROM DESPAIR: A TRANSLATION AND CRITICAL  
EXPLORATION OF HAGIWARA SAKUTARŌ'S ZETSUBŌ NO TŌSŌ***

A Thesis Presented

by

**SAMIK NEIL SIKAND**

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS**

May 2015

Japanese Language and Literature

***THE FLIGHT FROM DESPAIR: A TRANSLATION AND CRITICAL  
EXPLORATION OF HAGIWARA SAKUTARŌ'S ZETSUBŌ NO TŌSŌ***

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Approved as to style and content by:

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## **ABSTRACT**

### ***THE FLIGHT FROM DESPAIR: A TRANSLATION AND CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF HAGIWARA SAKUTARŌ'S ZETSUBŌ NO TŌSŌ***

**MAY 2015**

**SAMIK NEIL SIKAND, B.A., BOSTON UNIVERSITY**

**M.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST**

**Directed by: Professor Amanda C. Seaman**

The text that I have translated below, and for which the paper that precedes it is a critical introduction, is Hagiwara Sakutarō's *Zetsubō no Tōsō*, a collection of 204 aphorisms which I have translated as *The Flight from Despair*. My introduction concentrates on Sakutarō's use of the aphoristic form in order to show how he both follows and subverts the genre's conventions. First, I concentrate on the author's goal to tackle the "everyday" matters of life through his text rather than intellectual abstractions. I also bring attention to the concision of Sakutarō's style and the protean nature of the aphorism, which occupies an ambiguous zone between poetry and philosophy. Finally, I demonstrate how *The Flight from Despair* is a modernist text, and that Sakutarō's brand of modernism reveals itself most distinctly through his use of irony and paradox. However, I also indicate that Sakutarō remained a maverick in the literary establishment, and that pigeonholing him into any particular literary movement is risky.

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# CHAPTER 1

## CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

"This is how I recognize an authentic poet: by frequenting him, living a long time in the intimacy of his work, something changes in myself: not so much my inclinations or my tastes as my very blood, as if a subtle disease had been injected to alter its course . . . For the poet is an agent of destruction, a virus, a disguised disease, and the gravest danger, though a wonderfully vague one, for our red corpuscles. To live around him is to feel your blood run thin, to dream a paradise of anemia, and to hear, in your veins, the rustle of tears."<sup>1</sup> (E.M. Cioran)

Hagiwara Sakutarō (1886-1942), whom Donald Keene calls "the chief figure of modern Japanese poetry," was born the son of Dr. Hagiwara Mitsuzō and Hagiwara Kei in Maebashi, capital of Gunma Prefecture, Japan.<sup>2</sup> Sakutarō—the Japanese refer to him by his given name—grew up in prosperous circumstances. As the eldest son and heir, his parents tended to spoil him. Robert Epp, a translator of Sakutarō's poetry, suggests that this indulgence ironically impeded their son's growth, as it made him apt to avoid whatever made him unhappy: "[Sakutarō] sought ways to flee whatever made him feel miserable. Avenues of escape included reading, writing, [and] music."<sup>3</sup> The upshot of this

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<sup>1</sup> E.M. Cioran, *A Short History of Decay*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2012), 99.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era (Poetry, Drama, Criticism)* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1984), 260.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Epp, trans., *Rats' Nests: The Collected Poetry of Hagiwara Sakutarō*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stanwood: Yakusha, 1999), 29.

is that it encouraged Sakutarō to develop a love of the arts from an early age: he exhibited a proclivity for music in particular, and in high school, his discovery of the poet Yosano Akiko inspired him to write *tanka*.

Although Sakutarō survived his high school years relatively unscarred, unfortunately he was unable to cope with the transition to university. Between 1906 and 1911, Sakutarō shifted between schools in Tokyo, Kumamoto, and Okayama, only to end up dropping out of every one of them. In a letter to a friend following these setbacks, Sakutarō confessed to what he regarded as his remaining options: to attend medical school, to become a merchant, or to kill himself.<sup>4</sup> Clearly none of these options appealed to him. Between 1912 and 1915, however, while studying music and shifting back and forth between Tokyo and Maebashi, Sakutarō made important contacts in the literary world: two of them—Kitahara Hakushū (1885-1942) and Murō Saisei (1889-1962)—became lifelong friends who encouraged him in his artistic endeavors. In 1917, after a spurt of artistic inspiration, Sakutarō published *Tsuki ni hoeru* (*Howling at the Moon*), which shocked the literary establishment with its haunting imagery and unprecedented mastery of the vernacular language.<sup>5</sup> Although the critical evaluation of his subsequent collections of poetry are mixed, Sakutarō sealed his reputation as a poet with *Howling at the Moon*.

Even well-informed readers, however, seem to forget that Sakutarō was a literary chameleon who could eloquently express himself through various prose forms as well. As an essayist and critic, for example, Sakutarō published notable works like *Shi no genri* (*The Principles of Poetry*, 1928) and *Kyōshū no shijin Yosa Buson* (*Poet of Nostalgia*:

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 263-264.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 26.

*Yosa Buson*, 1936). In 1935, he even published a quirky novella called *Nekomachi* (*Cat Town*). Perhaps one of Sakutarō's most unusual contributions to 20<sup>th</sup> century Japanese letters, however, is his collections of aphorisms.

Sakutarō published four volumes of aphorisms during his lifetime: 1. *Atarashiki yokujō* (*Fresh Passions*, 1922), 2. *Kyomō no seigi* (*The Justice of Delusions*, 1929), 3. *Zetsubō no tōsō* (*The Flight from Despair*, 1935), and 4. *Minato ni te* (*In Port*, 1940). Sakutarō specifically uses the imported word *aforizumu* (アフォリズム) to describe these works: "In Japan, people often use the word '*shingen*' to describe aphorisms [*aforizumu*], but this is not an appropriate translation . . . [*shingen*] are overly intellectual, devoid of human strength or weakness . . . On the other hand, aphorisms [*aforizumu*] do not lack human warmth."<sup>6</sup>

Following the publication of *The Flight from Despair*, philosopher Tanikawa Tetsuzō observed that Sakutarō "is the most talented individual in our age when it comes to writing aphorisms."<sup>7</sup> However, this quickly makes the new reader of these works ask—what exactly is an aphorism, and what is Sakutarō trying to accomplish with the form?

The first problem that frequently arises with a discussion of the aphorism is that both scholars and general readers alike do not know or cannot agree what it is. Concerning the vagueness of the term "aphorism," literary critic Gary Saul Morson observes, "Aphorism, dictum, maxim, witticism, hypothesis, thought, and many other

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<sup>6</sup> Yoshizō Kawamori 河盛好蔵, "Hagiwara no aforizumu" 萩原のアフォリズム (The aphorisms of Hagiwara), *Kenkyū nōto: Hagiwara Sakutarō zenshū dai go kan (furoku)* 研究ノート: 萩原朔太郎全集第五卷 (付録) (1976): 2.

<sup>7</sup> Tetsuzō Tanikawa 谷川徹三, *Zetsubō no tōsō to sono chosha* 『絶望の逃走』とその著者 ("The Flight from Despair" and its author), *Kenkyū nōto: Hagiwara Sakutarō zenshū dai go kan (furoku)* 研究ノート: 萩原朔太郎全集第五卷 (付録) (1936): 11.



terms for short expressions have no clear definition and are used in contradictory or overlapping ways."<sup>8</sup> The Japanese language also possesses multiple terms besides the imported word *aforizumu* (アフォリズム): Kawamori Yoshizō, a Japanese scholar who specialized in the French moralists, cites words like *kakugen* (格言), *kingen* (金言), *shingen* (箴言), and *keiku* (警句) as terms that seem deceptively analogous with "aphorism" in his essay "The Aphorisms of Hagiwara," which discusses Sakutarō's use of the form.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, to understand what Sakutarō is trying to accomplish with works like *The Flight from Despair* (henceforth *FFD*), a deeper study of the aphorism is necessary.<sup>10</sup> My aim here is to analyze Sakutarō's use of the form in order to show how he both follows and subverts the conventions of the genre. In Section 2, "The Everyday and the Aphorism," I concentrate on Sakutarō's self-avowed mission to use the aphorism to tackle the everyday matters of life one must face—work, marriage, death, and so on—rather than the kind of abstract issues that often occupy intellectuals. In Section 3, "Brevity and the Aphorism," I will not only examine the concision of Sakutarō's style but also his idiosyncratic tendency to develop many of his aphorisms into self-contained essays. In Section 4, "Literary Quality and the Aphorism," I examine the aphorism's ambiguous position in literature, and how Sakutarō's technique reflects the influence of both poetry

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<sup>8</sup> Gary Saul Morson, "The Aphorism: Fragments from the Breakdown of Reason," *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation* 34, no. 3 (2003): 409. (JSTOR)

<sup>9</sup> Kawamori, "Hagiwara no aforizumu," 2.

<sup>10</sup> The Japanese text of *Zetsubō no tōsō* 絶望の逃走 (*The Flight from Despair*) that I used for my translation is the 5<sup>th</sup> volume of Hagiwara Sakutarō's complete works (published by Chikuma Shobō in 1975). All references to *FFD* refer to my translation that follows this critical introduction: diverging from the original text, I have chosen to number the aphorisms in order to refer to them more easily in this introduction. For example, if I cite *FFD* 164 in my introduction, please refer to aphorism 164 ("The Delusion of Self-Confidence") in my translation.

and philosophy. In Section 5, "Sakutarō: The Modernist *Amanojaku*," I demonstrate how Sakutarō's aphoristic style—particularly his use of irony and paradoxes—places him among Japan's avant-garde movement of modernist writers active during the 1920s and 1930s. However, I will also show that Sakutarō's relationship to the literary establishment and to particular literary movements—even modernism—remained ambiguous. Finally, in Section 6, "Notes on the Translation," I will discuss some of the issues I encountered while translating *FFD*.

### The Everyday and the Aphorism

“People who pass their lives in reading and acquire their wisdom from books are like those who learn about a country from travel descriptions: they can impart information about a great number of things, but at bottom they possess no connected, clear, thorough knowledge of what the country is like.”<sup>11</sup> (Arthur Schopenhauer)

"The Taishō voices of opposition commonly shared a certain trust in everyday experience as the wellspring of their creative activity . . . along with a sense that everyday experience was the richest source of the dreams that would inform their writing."<sup>12</sup> (Kobayashi Hideo)

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<sup>11</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Classics, 2004), 91.

<sup>12</sup> Kobayashi, Hideo, *Literature of the Lost Home: Kobayashi Hideo - Literary Criticism, 1924-1939*, trans. Paul Anderer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 75.

One of Sakutarō's professed objectives in *FFD* is to bring attention to what Harry Harootunian calls the "everyday": "[Japanese] writers were privileging the details of everydayness in novels concentrating on the individual's experience."<sup>13</sup> Consequently, the content of *FFD* is, on the whole, rooted in real-life experience rather than solely in book-learning. Sakutarō wrote his aphorisms to stimulate our imagination and open up new ways of seeing *everyday life*, not to provide new authoritative answers to the quandaries of space, time, and matter that philosophers have futilely attempted to solve for thousands of years. Sakutarō states this mission clearly in the preface to *FFD*:

It is from my everyday existence that I have unearthed the *pensées* of this volume. In particular, the majority of these topics revealed themselves to me during meditative walks outside of my home—in the streets, in the woods, in trains, in department stores, in coffee shops, and in movie theaters. Just as a painter always walks with sketchbook in hand, I too carry a notebook on my person at all times and record my impressions wherever I may be. Thus, in one sense this volume is a record of my daily existence and akin to a diary.

Sakutarō's study is notably not included among the list of places. In other words, he did not pore over books to create *FFD*; rather, he attempted to use his own powers of observation and perception to unravel different truths about existence. Interestingly, Sakutarō's focus on the everyday puts him in a similar position to that of some of the harshest critics of his solipsistic poetry: the Marxists. Compare the preface of *FFD* to proletarian writer Kuroshima Denji's (1898-1943) explanation of his own artistic approach: "It doesn't matter whether I write about a factory, a farming village, or the army; I draw my materials from ordinary daily life, and in these materials I can find struggles, hopes, and an ideology no less intense than if I dealt with a confrontation."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Harry D. Harootunian, *History's Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Keene, Donald, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era (Fiction)* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1984), 604-605.

While it is difficult to argue that an artist of Sakutarō's temperament had much sympathy for the proletarian writers of the 1920s, it is undeniable that he at least shared a common goal with them during the formative process of his aphorisms: Sakutarō, like Marxist writer Tosaka Jun (1900-1945), "turned to everyday life as it was being lived and experienced to find concepts adequate to describing its fluidity."<sup>15</sup>

Kawamori Yoshizō points out that, besides Sakutarō, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke also published an aphoristic work, *Shuju no kotoba* (*A Dwarf's Words*), in 1925. Although Sakutarō was both an admirer of Akutagawa's work and a personal friend (note *FFD* 96), he claimed that *A Dwarf's Words* was "dull."<sup>16</sup> Kawamori suggests that the reason behind this unexpected criticism is that, to Sakutarō, Akutagawa's aphorisms were overly intellectual. They were insights gleaned from one's study, not the streets of the city. While amusing, they did not sufficiently tackle the problems of the everyday. Thus, what Akutagawa wrote were not "aphorisms," but, as Gary Morson might classify them, mere "witticisms"—entertaining but lacking depth.<sup>17</sup>

Repeatedly throughout *FFD*, one can see how Sakutarō draws extensively upon his experience of the everyday rather than abstract knowledge to write his aphorisms. In *FFD* 16 and 17, for example, Sakutarō talks about lessons that his ex-wife taught him. The reader can construe the former, in particular, as an implicit defense of his focus on the everyday: "My ex-wife taught me one thing alone: You digest food with your stomach, not with your mind. At dinnertime, she would always say this in a livelier fashion: 'Stop spacing out, and eat your damn food!'" This short, wry anecdote reveals the

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<sup>15</sup> Harry D. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 119.

<sup>16</sup> Kawamori, "Hagiwara no aforizumu," 2.

<sup>17</sup> Gary Saul Morson, *The Long and Short of It: From Aphorism to Novel* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), Kindle edition.

limits of intellectual speculation. *FFD* 17, in which the author describes an instance of his wife's jealousy, has an intimate, confessional tone that would feel out of place in a conventional work of speculative philosophy. As Harootunian writes, "What distinguished the discourse on everydayness was how often it concentrated on the details of multiple practices, starting with unimportant, shallow, and trivial occurrences."<sup>18</sup> Many of Sakutarō's aphorisms exhibit this preoccupation with seemingly banal occurrences like a marital spat: perhaps the author, by holding up a magnifying glass to the everyday, ultimately hopes to intuit more universal truths.

One of Sakutarō's most outstanding aphorisms that focuses on the everyday is *FFD* 85, "In the Crowd," which is a recollection of an experience in a crowd that Sakutarō develops into a longer aphorism (in Section 3, I will more closely examine the aspect of length in *FFD*). Sakutarō's vivid description of the scene gives the reader the impression that this aphorism stems from a personal experience:

Around noon, I was seated at a restaurant in the city. It was lively and bustling with customers, and every table was taken. A young couple, a group of students, a mother with her children—they all sat at their respective tables while talking about their families and everyday lives. Although each group was surrounded by other people, each conversation remained unique and shut off from the others. Those facing each other at their tables were so immersed in their private discussions that they hardly paid attention to their neighbors.

The author's portrayal of a crowded restaurant in the city is precisely the kind of everyday scene that Harootunian argues preoccupied Japanese writers during the 1920s. Sakutarō further develops this aphorism by describing another scene from everyday life, in which he observes couples walking hand-in-hand from the vantage point of a park bench. What makes this aphorism thought-provoking is that Sakutarō seamlessly transitions to a more universal truth about crowds that he gleans from these mundane

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<sup>18</sup> Harootunian, *History's Disquiet*, 71.

scenes: "The freedom of city life is the freedom to be in a crowd. The crowd consists entirely of individuals yet also possesses a collective will." *FFD* 85 reveals one of Sakutarō's favored strategies in writing aphorisms, which is to depict a seemingly trivial scene from everyday life in order to unravel deeper truths about human existence. While I focus on only a few of these "everyday" aphorisms in my introduction, there are many other similar instances throughout *FFD*, such as in 134 ("Literature and Physiology"), in which the author tries to comprehend literature by connecting it to the human body rather than to esoteric theories, or in 46 ("Young Men and Arguing"), in which the author memorably depicts an absurd scene of young men arguing in a bar.

Sakutarō, by extensively utilizing his personal experience of the everyday rather than pure book-learning, occupies a position similar to the one that Marxist thinker Tosaka Jun espouses: "Tosaka saw everyday life as the basic unifying element of the present . . . Philosophy had become too abstract . . . too removed from everyday life when, in fact, it was precisely the concreteness of everydayness that offered philosophy a grounding for speculation and a new purpose."<sup>19</sup> However, Sakutarō's emphasis on the everyday does not ally him solely with the Marxists: as the quote by Kobayashi Hideo at the beginning of this section suggests, other Taishō authors no doubt shared his enthusiasm. More importantly, many of history's most famous aphorists chose to emphasize daily experience over abstract intellectual speculation. Nicholas Chamfort and La Rochefoucauld, both masters of the genre, garnered many of their bleak insights through direct participation in everyday social affairs. Giacomo Leopardi—a different kind of aphorist in that he led a quiet and reclusive life—nevertheless understood this phenomenon well:

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<sup>19</sup> Harootunian, *History's Disquiet*, 141.

He who has little communication with people is seldom a misanthrope. True misanthropes are not found in solitude, but in the world. This is because it is practical experience of life, and certainly not philosophy, that makes people hate their fellows. And if someone who is a misanthrope withdraws from society, in his seclusion he loses his misanthropy.<sup>20</sup>

While it seems superficially like Leopardi is only discussing misanthropy here, he has in fact pinpointed the same reason why Sakutarō tried to gain inspiration for his aphoristic works by going out into society. In other words, separation from society—the fate of many writers—warps one's perception of society. Thus, true aphorisms must ultimately be the product of both learning and direct experience of the everyday. Sakutarō's *FFD* is an impressive work in the genre in that there is a careful balance between the two: both the author's deep reading and his observations of everyday life complement each other, resulting in a cohesive and compelling text. Perhaps one reason Sakutarō favored the aphorism to convey his thoughts is that the ambiguous nature of the form allowed him to both flexibly integrate his personal experiences along with more formal intellectual speculation without the restrictions that other genres—a formal philosophical treatise, for example—often impose.

### Brevity and the Aphorism

"Brevity is the soul of wit." (Shakespeare)

One aspect that most agree characterizes aphorisms is that they are short. In an introductory essay to Sakutarō in a handbook of Japanese literature edited by Naka

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<sup>20</sup> Giacomo Leopardi, *Thoughts*, trans. J.G. Nichols (London: Hesperus Press, 2002), 61.

Mitsuo, the aphorism is defined as being a form of expression with a "condensed" (*asshuku sareta*) form.<sup>21</sup> I believe that the word "condensed" is particularly apt: the image here is of taking a large group of sentences and squeezing out all that is superfluous, resulting in a densely-packed product that contains only the essential—or "gems" (*shugyoku*), as Sakutarō puts it.<sup>22</sup> Other genres, like the novel, often contain long, drawn-out descriptions of places, people, items, and sundry other entities. This is unacceptable in the aphorism. As Kawamori puts it, "The essence of the aphorism lies in 'possessing a very large range of meaning within a short sentence,' and this 'short sentence' is important."<sup>23</sup> Sakutarō also esteems brevity in his aphoristic works. In *FFD* 161, the author likens the art of writing to shooting a gun, while elsewhere he says it requires the celerity of fencing: "Forget posture: charge forward wildly, close your eyes and leap in," he advises (*FFD* 163). A succinct style of writing is more conducive to the kind of immediacy Sakutarō extols in these analogies. One reason Sakutarō may have favored the aphoristic style is that its economy of language is more efficient than other prose forms in grabbing the reader's attention.

Sakutarō repeatedly shows a facility for condensing profound ideas in a compact space throughout *FFD*. *FFD* 50 is a noteworthy example: "If a human being does not want to feel regrets, it is best that he do nothing. Then again, a life in which one does nothing is essentially a life of regret." In this terse aphorism, Sakutarō encourages the reader to think about the broader problem of action versus inaction in human affairs. Shakespeare wrote a whole play—*Hamlet*—with this problem as its pivot. Hamlet's

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<sup>21</sup> Mitsuo Naka 仲光雄, *Genshoku shiguma shin-kokugo binran* 原色シグマ新国語便覧 (Tokyo: Bun'eidō 文英堂, 2007), 238.

<sup>22</sup> Kawamori, "Hagiwara no aforizumu," 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.



dilemma lies in his inability to act, and his smoldering regret at hesitating to avenge his father finally pushes him to act—which in turn leads to his own demise. Thus, as one can see from *FFD* 50, a writer of aphorisms can capture in a few words what other authors sometimes need a much longer literary form to communicate. Gary Morson makes a cogent argument in his book *The Long and Short of It: From Aphorism to Novel* that the seed of many great longer works often originates from an aphorism of just one or two lines.

Outstanding aphorisms are often condensed into one sentence. However, readers may notice that Sakutarō's aphorisms sometimes occupy up to several paragraphs. Thus, the word "brief" requires qualification: some aphorisms are only one sentence long, while other aphorisms often develop into short essays. In this respect, *FFD* shows the influence of Japan's literary tradition of *zuihitsu* ("follow-the-brush" style), a genre that often resembles a compact essay. Distinguished Japanese authors in this style include Sei Shōnagon (c. 966-1017), Kamo no Chōmei (c. 1155-1216), and Yoshida Kenkō (c. 1283-1350). In the introduction to his final poetic collection, *Shukumei* (*Fate*), Sakutarō suggests that the three major works of these authors—*Makura no sōshi* (*The Pillow Book*), *Hōjōki* (*An Account of My Hut*), and *Tsurezuregusa* (*Essays in Idleness*) respectively—are actually early examples of *sanbunshi* (prose poem)—a genre that often overlaps with the aphorism—in Japan's literary history.<sup>24</sup> In the next section of this introduction, I will further study this important link between the prose poem and the aphorism.

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<sup>24</sup> Sakutarō Hagiwara, *Shukumei* 宿命 (*Fate*), in vol. 2 of *Hagiwara Sakutarō zenshū* 萩原朔太郎全集 (Chikuma Shobō 筑摩書房, 1976 (originally published by Sōgensha 創元社 in 1939)). (<http://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000067/card1790.html>)

A study of the *zuihitsu* style quickly reveals what Sakutarō is trying to accomplish by expanding some of his one-sentence aphorisms into short, desultory essays. Meredith McKinney observes the following about *Essays in Idleness*: "*Essays in Idleness* sprawls across the gamut of thought and experience . . . It is written with apparent artlessness in a string of sections of greatly varying length, rather like an occasional journal into which all kinds of passing thoughts are jotted. Continuities between sections can certainly be found, but it is the nature of *Essays in Idleness* to constantly surprise."<sup>25</sup> Everything McKinney writes here is equally applicable to *FFD*, particularly with respect to "varying length." Sakutarō sometimes presents more complex arguments that necessitate more than one sentence. Some of the most memorable aphorisms in *FFD* are those that span a full paragraph or more, like 88 ("The Philosophy of Divination"), 96 ("A Poet's Death is Sad"), and 99 ("The River Lethe"). In these longer aphorisms, which often contain all kinds of rhetorical strategies ranging from storytelling to philosophical speculation, Sakutarō appears to be taking full advantage of the aphorism's protean nature to convey his idiosyncratic ideas.

To summarize, Sakutarō's aphorisms display two kinds of brevity: in one kind, he compacts much thought into one sentence, while in the other kind he develops a thought over the course of a few paragraphs. The latter kind is like a truncated form of a Western essay or, more precisely, like the Japanese *zuihitsu*. As aphorisms, both forms of brevity are equally persuasive: as John Gross writes, "Compression is not necessarily the supreme stylistic virtue in an aphorism . . . the finest examples are not always the most terse."<sup>26</sup> Sakutarō's aphorisms, whether constituted of a single sentence or of several

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<sup>25</sup> Meredith McKinney, trans., *Essays in Idleness and Hōjōki* (New York: Penguin, 2013), Kindle edition.

<sup>26</sup> John Gross, *The Oxford Book of Aphorisms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), viii.

paragraphs, consistently impress the reader with their literary quality and profundity of thought.

### Literary Quality and the Aphorism

"Which of us has not, on his ambitious days, dreamed up the miracle of a poetic prose, musical without rhythm or rhyme, both supple and rough enough to adapt itself to the lyric movements of the soul, to the undulations of reverie, to the jolts of consciousness."<sup>27</sup> (Charles Baudelaire)

In this section, I would like to discuss the literary quality of Sakutarō's aphorisms. In other words, what is particularly aesthetically appealing about them? Why does an aphoristic collection appeal to us as a "work of literature?" In an essay he wrote on Nietzsche, Sakutarō suggests the answer to this question with comments like the following: "The aphorism is a literature for poets;" "The aphorism is a form of poetry;" and "It is precisely the poet who is a true philosopher."<sup>28</sup> Thus, I believe we must construe *FFD* as a literary work in the following way: 1. It is a work of *poetic prose*, to borrow Baudelaire's words—*FFD* is written in prose, but it possesses certain aspects that make it akin to poetry, and 2. It is a work of *philosophy* in that it stimulates our minds to think about some of the fundamental problems of human existence.

Many literary scholars have noticed the correlations between poetic and aphoristic writing. Joshua Dienstag observes that aphorisms "do aspire to a certain kind of poetic

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<sup>27</sup> Mary Ann Caws and Hermine B. Riffaterre, *The Prose Poem in France: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 26.

<sup>28</sup> Sakutarō Hagiwara, *Niiche ni tsuite no zakkan* ニイチェに就いての雑感 (Impressions of Nietzsche), in *Nihon no meizuihitsu: tetsugaku* 日本の名随筆: 哲学 (Famous Japanese essays: philosophy) (Sakuhinsha 作品社, 1998). (<http://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000067/card1766.html>)

achievement and, though they usually lack the sort of formal structure that we associate with poetry, it is not altogether a mistake to view them through such a lens."<sup>29</sup> Some of literature's most famous aphorists—Nicholas Chamfort, La Rochefoucauld, and Friedrich Nietzsche, for example—are particularly noteworthy because of the scrupulous attention they paid to literary style. As John Gross writes, the aphorism "depends for its full effect on verbal artistry, on a subtle or concentrated perfection of phrasing which can sometimes approach poetry in its intensity."<sup>30</sup> Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that aphorists must pay the same meticulous attention to literary style that poets do. Just like the aforementioned aphorists, Sakutarō also crafts some particularly memorable aphorisms throughout *FFD* that affix themselves in the reader's mind. One aphorism that particularly approaches poetry in its intensity and depth is *FFD* 96, which I would like to analyze to show how Sakutarō's aphorisms exemplify the same literary merits of his poetic oeuvre.

*FFD* 96, "A Poet's Death is Sad," occupies a full page of text, marking it as a *zuihitsu*-style aphorism that I discussed in the previous section. It is divided into three parts. In part 1, Sakutarō relates an anecdote about the writer Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (a personal friend of the author): "One day Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, mired in the depths of irremediable despair, spoke to me of the darkness of death and the meaninglessness of existence. No, he did not speak to me; he was *pleading* with me." When Sakutarō tries to lift his friend's spirits by reminding Akutagawa of the latter's stellar literary accomplishments and fame, an enraged Akutagawa responds that his works and fame are worthless. Sakutarō likens Akutagawa's descent into despair to Nietzsche's latter years,

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<sup>29</sup> Joshua Foa Dienstag, *Pessimism: Philosophy, Ethic, Spirit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 232.

<sup>30</sup> Gross, *The Oxford Book of Aphorisms*, viii.

when Nietzsche, growing increasingly insane, could hardly recall the books that he had once written. In part 2, Sakutarō contrasts the fate of these authors with the last days of military men like Admiral Nelson, who died contented because he had successfully discharged his duties to his country. Finally, in part 3, Sakutarō quotes a proverb: "A bird's death is sad, and a man's death is pleasant." However, Sakutarō chooses to invert this proverb in light of his knowledge and experience: "A man's death is pleasant, and a poet's death is sad!"

Sakutarō published *Shukumei* (*Fate*), his last collection of poetry, in 1939. He chose to incorporate seventy-three prose-poems (*sanbunshi*) as well in this anthology. One of these was *FFD* 96. Clearly this aphorism possesses literary qualities that Sakutarō believed made it equal to his lyrics, or else he would not have chosen to incorporate it in his final collection. Indeed, a careful analysis of *FFD* 96 reveals both structural and thematic elements that make it commensurate with the author's poetry. For instance, it is a kind of narrative poem because Sakutarō is telling a story: here, it is about his friend Akutagawa, who later committed suicide. The author consequently provides a contrast with this personal anecdote by relating a historical one: that of Admiral Nelson. Sakutarō finally shifts from a narrative mode to an elegiac mode. His friend's tragic death serves to teach him about the sad fate of many artists, especially poets. In their last days, even the most accomplished and successful poets often grapple with despair, doubt, and even madness. Their works and fame are powerless to save them. In the end, Sakutarō gives a new twist to an old proverb: "A man's death is pleasant, and a poet's death is sad!" Thus, *FFD* 96 possesses a keen sense of *mujō* (impermanence), a quality that characterizes many Japanese poems from the medieval era onwards: fame, honor, and ultimately

human happiness are powerless to resist time's march. However, Sakutarō's aphorism also reveals the author as a poet of the modern era: the tale of Akutagawa's demise, rather than *mujō*, suggests a bitter sense of life's futility and absurdity that characterizes many twentieth-century works of literature.

The aphorism, as Sakutarō uses it, clearly shares important characteristics with poetry. However, Sakutarō was not only a poet but also a philosopher well-read in thinkers like Immanuel Kant, Henri Bergson, William James, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Arthur Schopenhauer.<sup>31</sup> Sakutarō's philosophizing, however, is not an attempt to provide a systematic explanation of the world. In this respect, he resembles most aphoristic writers, as Joshua Dienstag points out: "The aphorism stands at the greatest distance from that form of philosophy that attempts to depict a grand order to the universe."<sup>32</sup> Sakutarō's philosophizing—rooted in the "everyday," which I discussed in Section 2—is similar not only to the thinking of other aphorists but also to movements in philosophy that concern themselves with daily human existence, like ancient Cynicism, Epicureanism, and Stoicism. Gary Morson delineates a useful approach to reading an aphoristic work like *FFD*: "There is no single discovery to be made and no method for arriving at a definitive answer. There is no system, nothing generalizable and sure, and we must probe, guess, explore as best we can."<sup>33</sup>

Sakutarō's aphorisms about memory particularly stand out for their philosophical depth. In *FFD* 99, "The River of Forgetfulness," Sakutarō first cites Plato's idea about Lethe (the river of forgetfulness): before human beings are reborn into existence, they must first drink from this river to erase the memories of their previous existence.

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<sup>31</sup> Epp, *Rats' Nests*, 39.

<sup>32</sup> Dienstag, *Pessimism*, 230.

<sup>33</sup> Morson, "The Aphorism," 421.

Sakutarō next proposes an interesting scenario—what if someone failed to drink from the river, thus retaining all their memories? In essence, this would be equivalent to immortality. However, Sakutarō suddenly surprises the reader by drawing the conclusion that people would die of boredom. In *FFD* 36, Sakutarō also provokes the reader with his thoughts on memory. Here he suggests that the difference between optimists and pessimists is a matter of memory: the former recall only their good memories, and the latter recall only their bad ones. Sakutarō is not playing "what if" mind games in aphorisms like these. In fact, what he is saying is quite disturbing: he seems to suggest that human beings can only exist so long as their memories are deficient. In *FFD* 99, he points out that if our minds were sharp and we were to remember everything with perfect clarity, life would lose all its novelty and freshness; and in *FFD* 36, he points out that, contrary to popular opinion, a bad memory may serve one well in life as it allows one to forget the countless miseries and setbacks that inevitably plague every human existence.

While I chose to focus on Sakutarō's aphorisms about memory to show his capacity for philosophical depth, I could just as well have cited Sakutarō's ideas about marriage, illness, fate, suicide, crowds, failures, poetry, and countless other topics throughout *FFD* to demonstrate the same point. What is particularly attractive about Sakutarō as a philosopher is that he is always willing to sail with his thoughts into uncharted territory. For example, in *FFD* 99 (discussed above), most writers would not make the mental leap from memory to immortality to ennui. While Sakutarō can be outrageous, often there is a perverse logic in what he says, even when he contradicts conventional wisdom.

### Sakutarō: The Modernist *Amanojaku*

"On or about December, 1910, human character changed."<sup>34</sup> (Virginia Woolf)

As I mentioned in Section 1, Sakutarō's seminal collection of poetry *Howling at the Moon* gave a jolt to the poetic establishment. What I wish to call attention to here is the publication date of Sakutarō's work: 1917, one year before the conclusion of World War I. Even if one does not agree with Woolf's statement at the beginning of this section that human character itself changed at the beginning of this decade, it is undeniable that a new kind of literature—later called "modernism" by critics—was evolving rapidly at the time. While critics often cite European authors like Woolf, Joyce, Proust, and Eliot when discussing literary modernism, modernism played an equally important role in the development of Japanese 20<sup>th</sup> century letters. In this section, I want to demonstrate that the backdrop of modernism is pivotal to understanding Sakutarō's use of the aphorism in *FFD*. At the same time, I also want to show that Sakutarō's relationship to the literary establishment nevertheless remained ambiguous to the end of his life, and that it is risky to pigeonhole him as a modernist or as an adherent of a single school.

Several critics have written about Japanese modernism. For example, Seiji Lippit's *Topographies of Japanese Modernism* pinpoints drastic changes like rapid urbanization in the development of Japanese modernism, while William Jefferson Tyler has assembled an anthology of modernist fiction in *Modanizumu: Modernist Fiction from Japan, 1913-1938*. It is no coincidence that Tyler's anthology includes a work by

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<sup>34</sup> Pericles Lewis, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 64.



Sakutarō: *Nekomachi* (*Cat Town*). "As a cultural, artistic, and philosophical phenomenon that occurred across the globe circa the turn of the twentieth century," Tyler writes, "modernism was not solely the product of the historically privileged master texts, paintings, and manifestos of Western Europe . . . [it] became a powerful intellectual idea, mode of artistic expression, and source of popular fashion in Japan from approximately 1910 to 1940, a period that coincides with the emergence of other modernisms across the globe."<sup>35</sup>

Modernism itself is a nebulous term that refers to a wide range of texts and, as Steven Matthews writes, "The modernist 'canon' is frequently being added to."<sup>36</sup> The thematic territory of these texts is equally vast. What is relevant to understanding *FFD*, however, is the *loss of certainty* that occurred around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and I believe that this is what Woolf may be referring to in her famous statement. Ricardo Quinones adeptly portrays the mental state of the modernist author in *Mapping Literary Modernism*: "The experience is distinct of a suddenly revealed cosmic emptiness behind human experience, of the unresponsiveness of alien surroundings that seriously questions humanistic ideals or simple endeavor, and even of the dissolution of the known, ordinary, solid world."<sup>37</sup> The world is no longer a place of certitude but of complexity, and this in turn engenders self-doubt and skepticism.

Although Japan did not experience World War I in the same way that Europe did, during the 1920s Japan experienced its own cataclysm: the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923. Within a few days, the dead and the missing surpassed 100,000, over 570,000

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<sup>35</sup> William Jefferson Tyler, *Modanizumu: Modernist Fiction from Japan, 1913-1938* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 18-19.

<sup>36</sup> Steven Matthews, *Modernism* (London: Arnold, 2004), 13.

<sup>37</sup> Ricardo J. Quinones, *Mapping Literary Modernism: Time and Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 40.

buildings collapsed, and, in the resultant air of terror and suspicion, vigilante groups murdered innocent groups of Koreans.<sup>38</sup> Lippit argues that the earthquake "had far-reaching effects on literary and cultural production . . . The earthquake as an event . . . was a tremendous shock with intense and often contradictory effects on writers' consciousness of modern culture."<sup>39</sup> The shock of the earthquake turned out to be only the beginning of Japan's woes: Andrew Gordon lists "economic depression, intense social conflict, military expansion, and the assassination of prime ministers and leading capitalists" as other shocks to Japan during the early 1930s.<sup>40</sup> Finally, renowned author Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's suicide in 1927, which Sakutarō explicitly refers to in his aphorisms (*FFD* 45 and 96), was a symbolic sign that the world was falling apart. Regarding the implications of this particular suicide, Inoue Yoshio argued that "his death went far beyond any personal tragedy and marked a general crisis for an entire generation of thinkers and writers."<sup>41</sup> Thus, Sakutarō's publication of *FFD* in 1935 is significant: Japan as a whole may have felt itself to be on the verge of apocalypse, and this backdrop no doubt influenced Sakutarō's work.

This apocalyptic mood created what Dennis Brown calls the "modernist self," a selfhood which is "pluralist, heterogeneous and discontinuous."<sup>42</sup> He argues that the modernists were suspicious about what "any *truth* about self might be," because "the self reveals itself as a collage of disparities, conflicts, self-deceptions."<sup>43</sup> This is important to keep in mind when reading *FFD* because, for Sakutarō, it is a matter of course that the

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<sup>38</sup> Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 140 and 153.

<sup>39</sup> Seiji M. Lippit, *Topographies of Japanese Modernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 22.

<sup>40</sup> Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 181.

<sup>41</sup> Lippit, *Topographies of Japanese Modernism*, 40.

<sup>42</sup> Dennis Brown, *The Modernist Self in Twentieth-Century English Literature: A Study in Self-Fragmentation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 2.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 111 and 142.

self and the world at large defy humanity's feeble attempts at comprehension. As a philosopher, this worldview places Sakutarō in company with Greek skeptics like Pyrrho and the Sophists rather than with the thinkers of the Enlightenment. Through the medium of the aphorism, Sakutarō is able to adroitly express his personal brand of skepticism through both irony and paradox. In other words, he ironically examines so-called sacred institutions like marriage in order to demonstrate that our certitudes regarding their infallibility are absurd, while through paradox—which I define here as the presentation of contrasting truths—he shows that one cannot make any categorical statements about anything. In other words, the universe is an enormous prism refracting an infinite number of conflicting truths, and this perspective leads modernist authors like Sakutarō "to juxtapositions that could be startling and unexpected."<sup>44</sup>

*FFD* is a modernist text that supports Tyler's claim that Sakutarō is an author with a "repeated fascination with the relativistic nature of truth."<sup>45</sup> The reader faces this immediately in the text through Sakutarō's subversive thinking about marriage and love. First, Sakutarō crushes the idea that fortuitous romantic love can lead to a good marriage in *FFD* 2: "To think that you can randomly unite one man and one woman and hope for a flawless marriage to result is more absurd and nonsensical than pounding arbitrarily on two piano keys and expecting a harmonious melody." He further develops this skepticism regarding the viability of marriage in 14:

Love is a crafty scam of nature. Love lures human beings with its sweet fragrance, leading them into bearing children and making a family; in other words, duping them into taking on life's most excruciating burdens. In the modern age, the clever among us fall in love but avoid reproduction, eating the fruit but spitting out the pit in an attempt to thwart the swindler that is nature.

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<sup>44</sup> Quinones, *Mapping Literary Modernism*, 88.

<sup>45</sup> Tyler, *Modanizumu*, 543.

Sakutarō devaluates man's cherished illusions by arguing that love, the lofty subject of so much literature and the other arts, is no more than a sly ploy by nature to fool human beings into perpetuating the cycle of misery that is birth and death. His sarcastic conclusion is that a much wiser course would be to dispense with bearing children altogether, which is a refutation of marriage's *raison d'être*. He brings this skepticism regarding marriage to a conclusion in *FFD* 20, in which he cites Yoshida Kenkō's exhortation that "a man should not get married." There is no doubt that Sakutarō enjoyed the irony of citing a classical source to defend the modern backlash against marriage and rearing children.

However, Sakutarō shows his modernist leanings by presenting multiple viewpoints regarding marriage and love. In *FFD*'s very first aphorism, he presents the idea that the lack of freedom in a Japanese marriage is precisely what makes the institution work: "The Eastern family structure, looked at from a utilitarian perspective, is by no means contemptible." This is a striking contrast with the liberal perspective I analyzed above. Not only does Sakutarō make the assumption that the institution is viable, he avers that a marriage in which one is constantly subject to surveillance is in fact an excellent arrangement. This puts him in opposition to the time's trends, in which figures like the "modern girl" were ushering in a new age of sexual liberation.<sup>46</sup> Sakutarō further develops this conservative approach to marriage by arguing in favor of what he calls the "nutritional value" of an Eastern marriage, in which the parents' strict—even tyrannical—approach will ultimately help the children much more than pampering them will. In this way, Sakutarō presents the reader with contradictory views regarding marriage. By

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<sup>46</sup> Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 155.

presenting all sides as both true and untrue, Sakutarō is urging the reader to come to his own conclusions.

Just as with marriage, Sakutarō also ironically approaches the phenomenon of suicide from several different and surprising angles. His first surprising assertion is that the term "suicide" is a misnomer:

There is no such thing as "suicide." Unavoidable and cruel circumstances drive a man into a corner and force him to slit his throat. Thus, *all suicide is murder*. All suicides know their killers in a corner of their subconscious, and they bear an amorphous fury and grudge towards a foe that no one can see. To pacify the souls of those who have killed themselves, we must seek out and interrogate the true criminals—be it the structure of society or the unjust rules of nature herself—and punish them with the full force of the law. (*FFD* 68)

By asserting that suicide is in fact murder, Sakutarō presents a surprisingly sympathetic attitude to the act. Regardless of time and place, this is an unusual view of suicide. He further complicates the topic in *FFD* 63 by saying that the primary deterrent to suicide is not the terror of physical pain, which is the conventional view, but regret: "Suicide itself is not frightening. The contemplation of suicide does not extend to the agony of dying; rather, when one's death is set in stone, one thinks of the *regret* that one has done something utterly irrevocable." Thus, it is suicide's inevitability—its certainty—that is even more terrifying than the splatter of one's head against the concrete that he so graphically describes in this aphorism.

But, as with marriage, Sakutarō presents dissimilar views elsewhere. In *FFD* 45, Sakutarō makes the startling claim that "There is nothing as buoyant and cheerful as a suicide note . . . The tragedy of suicide is the *process* leading up to the decision. Once one comes to a firm resolution, all gloominess vanishes. Suicide itself is cheerful; it even makes life joyful." In 63, it is suicide's inevitability that is terrifying; in 45, it is precisely

suicide's inevitability which is a source of joy. Sakutarō makes the radical argument that, in a world in which one is plagued by the anxiety of never knowing the moment of one's death, the suicide enjoys the rare satisfaction of this ultimate certainty. This unusual view may be what underlies Sakutarō's enigmatic assertion in *FFD* 66 that "All suicides are comic characters." They are able to feel a unique elation that other human beings cannot know, and this makes them cheerful—even comical.

When Sakutarō discusses topics like marriage or suicide, he inevitably reveals his modernist side by refusing to adhere to one point of view. Life is too complicated to make simplistic conclusions, the author tells us. A reader of *FFD* must not forget that Sakutarō shares deep affinities with the kind of authors whom Pericles Lewis christens the modernist "masters of suspicion," who "taught the twentieth century to look for hidden meanings behind the apparent surface of a text."<sup>47</sup> Thus, it is risky to attempt to find unifying ideas among Sakutarō's aphorisms. Quinones' assertion that modernism "is committed to negating any prevalent style or position, including its own" is worth remembering.<sup>48</sup> It is this modernist attitude that underlies Sakutarō's adroit use of the paradox, or the simultaneous presentation of two plausibly true but contradictory ideas. While earlier I illustrated how Sakutarō subverts common ideas about marriage and suicide through irony and unusual perspectives, he is also fond of using pithy paradoxes to annihilate whatever convictions we may hold.

Once again, Sakutarō displays some of his best paradoxes when writing about love: "The mystery of human existence is that without fail the person whom you love responds with hate, and the person that you hate responds with love" (*FFD* 9). According

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<sup>47</sup> Lewis, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism*, 24.

<sup>48</sup> Quinones, *Mapping Literary Modernism*, 250.

to Sakutarō's formula, love and hate are not only two sides of the same coin—as other authors have pointed out—but in fact these two opposites form the basis of all romantic relationships. Romantic love is unrequited love, Sakutarō argues, and a relationship without a certain amount of hatred is inconceivable. He uses another paradox in *FFD* 19 to demonstrate how love and hate are one and the same thing:

When men, spitting in disgust, cruelly expose and specify every flaw that a woman possesses—her stupidity, her selfishness, her jealousy, her frivolousness, her hysteria, her untamable savagery, and so on—it is, in fact, an indication of sexual interest.

Hatred is love, Sakutarō suggests. By setting up this paradox of hatred and love, he suggests that the two are not the antonyms we commonly regard them as. "Interest" is the key word here: both love and hatred reveal some kind of interest in someone else. Therefore, the author suggests that the opposite of love is not hatred, as we may believe, but indifference—an utter lack of interest. Sakutarō's third paradox in the development of this thought appears in *FFD* 31:

The advantage of marriage is that it helps one to perceive the true nature of women; the disadvantage is that it makes one disillusioned with them. Consequently, unmarried novelists are unable to write about women. A married poet, on the other hand, is no longer able to sing about them.

Interest in someone leads to marriage, but marriage, by forcing constant contact with the other person, leads to tedium and ultimately back to indifference. Sakutarō revels in paradoxes like this throughout his aphorisms. The genre itself, with its modernistic quality of fragmentation, allows him to create such startling juxtapositions without coming across as ridiculous.

Another set of paradoxes Sakutarō develops throughout *FFD* play on the ideas of tragedy and comedy. In *FFD* 71, "The Essence of Tragedy," he fully develops this strand of thought:

Tragedy begins when men, failing to understand their own limitations and sinking into delusion, become intent on attaining what is beyond their reach. As some people have pointed out, Don Quixote is the archetype of tragedy—from this, we can say that all tragedy is also a form of comedy. Conversely, the essence of comedy inevitably possesses fundamental similarities to tragedy. Chaplin's genius and success as an actor derive from his deep insight into the true spirit of comedy.

Just like love and hatred, comedy and tragedy are not antithetical terms: the fundamental nature of the two are so similar, according to Sakutarō, that perhaps they are even the same thing. Sakutarō seems to echo Pushkin's famous comment about Gogol: "Behind his laughter you feel the unseen tears." Readers generally see Don Quixote as a humorous character, but Sakutarō subverts this traditional reading with the argument that the essence of the character is tragic, because Don Quixote is constantly chasing a phantom—the path of the chivalrous knight—and this is ultimately a vain and pointless quest. As for Chaplin, Sakutarō dedicates a whole aphorism—"Chaplin and Intellectuals" (*FFD* 47)—to the actor, in which he makes a similar argument: "Charlie Chaplin's humor is paradoxical in that it shapes sadness into laughter." In this way, Sakutarō subverts simplistic antonyms like comedy and tragedy, thus revealing his stance as an ironic modernist.

Another paradox that Sakutarō develops humorously throughout *FFD* involves laziness and diligence. There is no end to the number of so-called "wise" authors throughout history who have exhorted their readers to work hard. Sakutarō, on the other hand, is at pains to demonstrate the opposite: that laziness and wastefulness play an equally important role in the creative process, and are sometimes even superior to



unfailing diligence. To prove his point, Sakutarō calls the reader's attention to the life of Baudelaire:

Charles Baudelaire squandered his inheritance within just two years of living an indulgent and immoderate life in Paris. Later, he wrote *The Flowers of Evil*, from which he did not even earn enough money to buy a pack of cigarettes. To put it another way, Baudelaire's wastefulness—exceeding the capabilities of any abacus—was a risky investment. He turned out to be a perspicacious investor: the fruit of his prodigal lifestyle—*The Flowers of Evil*—far exceeded the value and preciousness of his inheritance . . . In life, everything one spends will be remunerated, even if our utilitarian abacuses seem to say otherwise. There is no such thing as true "wastefulness." (FFD 72)

Sakutarō, by cleverly showing how Baudelaire's laziness and profligacy were in fact extremely productive because it led to the creation of one of history's greatest collections of poetry, subverts a more typical interpretation of laziness. Just as Sakutarō complicated the dichotomies of love/hatred and comedy/tragedy, he suggests that laziness/diligence may not be the antonyms we believe. While Sakutarō demonstrated with the above aphorism that laziness is not always unproductive, he also subjects the ideal of diligence to equal scrutiny in his memorable parable "The Lunatic Who Watches The Clock" (FFD 74). This aphorism features a character who obsesses over every single second lest it be wasted:

The director of the hospital explained to me: "This unhappy fellow regards every moment of life as ceaseless activity. Thus, he gazes intently at the clock day after day lest he waste a single precious moment of life. Go on, try saying something to him. He will shout at you in irritation: 'Shut up! Just now, another precious second has passed. Time is life! Time is life!'"

The patient in this aphorism is the opposite of Baudelaire: he is a paragon of diligence. But, ironically, this diligence is utterly wasteful: he is so obsessed with every moment that he ends up leading a completely unproductive existence. Sakutarō's facetious portrayal of the lunatic obsessed with time show the modernist qualities of

"artistic subversion" and "chic playfulness" that William Tyler argues characterize modernist writers like Sakutarō.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, Sakutarō reveals his modernist stance throughout *FFD* most prominently in his use of irony and paradox, by which he subverts traditional conceptions of marriage, suicide, love, tragedy, and so on. Sakutarō is truly an author who revels in contradictions. Perhaps this is what explains his sympathetic portrayal of Ashikaga Takauji (1305-1358) in *FFD* 110:

While his view of life was optimistic, he was, at the same time, a pessimist. He was an ambitious man who adored peace; he was both murderer and humanitarian; he was both a hero and a man of deep piety. Takauji was plagued by contradictions. He accepted these contradictions—even affirmed the meaning of his existence in the midst of them—and went on fighting his tragic war to the end.

It is possible that Sakutarō also hoped that his readers, by acknowledging the multiple and contradictory viewpoints of every issue, would, like Ashikaga Takauji, develop a deeper appreciation for the complexity of human life. At the same time, the author may be trying to justify his own ambiguous relationship to the literary establishment in the 1930s. Sakutarō was always open to all kinds of literature, regardless of what genres or schools they were associated with. He eloquently states this position in *FFD* 191: "I have always denied literary *isms*, while nevertheless affirming the value of all literary *works*. Thus, in my understanding of art, both "denial" and "affirmation" live side by side—nor is this a contradiction . . . The true artist holds neither absolute friends nor absolute allies. He invariably exists as a single, individual unit and a man of independence."

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<sup>49</sup> Tyler, *Modanizumu*, 58.

For example, Sakutarō is willing in *FFD* to absorb traits even from the Marxists, whom he hardly emulated in his early solipsistic poetry: as I discuss in Section 2, Sakutarō's aim to capture the "everyday" is remarkably similar to the mission of Marxist authors. In *FFD* 191, he says the following about the Marxists: "I do not agree with Marxism's view of literature. However, I see no reason to categorically deny artistic works under the Marxist label. Art remains independent from this kind of quibbling, and it necessitates a different mode of appreciation and criticism." Consequently, it seems that Sakutarō was willing to absorb elements even from a school of literature that he did not identify strongly with.

Kevin Doak is one scholar who is particularly sensitive to Sakutarō's perpetually ambivalent relationship to the literary establishment during the 1930s. He identifies Sakutarō's fondness for the mythical imp *Amanojaku* as most symbolic of the author's refusal to kowtow to any particular school of literature: "Hagiwara takes an interest in this trickster because of its reputation for 'constantly rebelling against the common things, even against its own thought and tastes *that have already become general*.'" <sup>50</sup> Sakutarō, like many Japanese writers, began his career under the influence of a plethora of Western literary movements: In *FFD* 204, "Belated Regrets," the author cites "Naturalism, Russian literature . . . Tolstoyism . . . Epicureanism, Aestheticism, Individualism, Satanism . . . Romanticism." The fact that *FFD* 204—Sakutarō's final aphorism—concerns genre seems to imply that the author himself was haunted by the reality that his literature never occupied a firm position within the literary establishment: "Naive as I was, I blindly obeyed these literary directives. And, precisely because I took them to

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<sup>50</sup> Kevin Michael Doak, *Dreams of Difference: The Japan Romantic School and the Crisis of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 39.

heart, the literary establishment shut me out, and I became a distant outsider in the world of Japanese letters" (*FFD* 204).

Perhaps it is Sakutarō's disillusionment with the Western isms he cites in addition to his own frustration as an "outsider" that led him in 1938 (three years after the publication of *FFD*) to publish the essay "Return to Japan" (*Nihon e no kaiki*), in which Sakutarō seemingly urges his countrymen to abandon Western thought in favor of Japanese thought. However, as Doak astutely points out, "When it is recalled that Hagiwara was fond of playing the mandolin and of quoting Baudelaire, his call for a return to Japan appears ironic, at least, and perhaps can be seen as the result of a lifetime devoted to poetry as an outlet for the mental anguish of a modern man."<sup>51</sup> In other words, Sakutarō no longer sees hope in the literature of the West, but, as Doak indicates, it seems unconvincing that this pioneer of modern poetry ultimately found solace in his native tradition. Consciously or not, Sakutarō followed Kobayashi Hideo's advice that "when vacuous theories threaten to displace the writer or to overshadow the writer's presence, each writer should work tirelessly to discover his own destiny, his own possibility, his own desire."<sup>52</sup>

Thus, the last words of *FFD* are fitting: "Driven to this point, just where do I go from here? My literary future is pitch-black; I see nothing in it but falsehood and skepticism. My regrets—they come too late!" Hagiwara Sakutarō ultimately served no one but himself, from his earliest poetry to his final essays and aphorisms: while absorbing disparate elements from all kinds of literature, from modernism to Marxism, he nevertheless remained a unique, lonely voice within 20<sup>th</sup> century Japanese literature.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>52</sup> Kobayashi, *Literature of the Lost Home*, 45.

### Notes on the Translation

One of the most decisive factors that determines the success or failure of a translation is how well-versed the translator is in the genre of the text. Knowledge of genre, in fact, is more important than linguistic competence in the field of translation: a translator's insight into how one writes in a certain genre makes it more likely that he will be able to render a Japanese sentence into what one would actually say in English. An ignorance of a genre's conventions, on the other hand, aggravates the risk of creating an awkward text that too slavishly follows the literal meaning of the words in the source text. Thus, when faced with the formidable task of translating Sakutarō's *The Flight from Despair* into English, my priority was to pinpoint the text's genre and become familiar with its conventions.

While *FFD* appears to be a collection of aphorisms, Sakutarō complicates such a simple reduction of the text. In the introduction, he implies that the reader may also construe *FFD* as any combination of the following genres: poetry, philosophy, essay, diary, and, amazingly, "a kind of novel as well." As a translator, this was hardly encouraging. This is why, in earlier sections of this introduction, I was so preoccupied with the question of genre: I believed that the success of my translation depended on a precise understanding of the structure of Sakutarō's aphoristic form.

Luckily, Sakutarō himself references some of the authors that inspired his own work, such as Nietzsche and Schopenhauer (note *FFD* 201, "My Great Teachers"). I began by reading these authors, in addition to exploring other masters of the aphorism such as La Rochefoucauld, Pascal, Chamfort, and Cioran. Interestingly, I relied on the

work of other translators to read the writings of these great authors. What most struck me in all these works was the beauty of the style, which came through powerfully even in translation. It is true, just as Sakutarō says, that the aphorism is an amalgamation of different genres, but what I realized is that what all aphorisms seem to share at their core is a certain stylistic eloquence.

Thus, in rendering *FFD* into English, my aspiration was to achieve some of the eloquence that the aphorism ideally should possess—even in translation. This approach put me in the opposite camp of Vladimir Nabokov, who declared that the "clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase."<sup>53</sup> In the case of *FFD*, I concluded that a clumsy literal translation would fail to convey the eloquence of the original and, moreover, that a "clumsy" aphorism no longer deserves to be called an aphorism.

As I discuss in Section 3, one of the secrets underlying the impressive style of the aphoristic form is its brevity. Therefore, in translating *FFD* into English I strove to avoid unnecessary verbiage. This approach occasionally forced me to omit words in the original text. Namely, Sakutarō is fond of using conjunctions like *sono ue ni mata* (and what is more, in addition), *kaku no gotoku* (in this way), and *sunawachi* (in other words). While Sakutarō's use of conjunctions creates a smooth, logical flow in the Japanese text, I quickly realized that using too many conjunctions in English resulted in very awkward prose. I was generally able to solve this difficulty through the use of conjunctive punctuation like semicolons and dashes. This allowed me to use fewer words in English while nevertheless linking the sentences to create a logical flow of thought.

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<sup>53</sup> Lawrence Venuti (editor), *The Translation Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), 71.

My translation of the first few lines of *FFD* 4 illustrate the above. The original reads:

その選択に関して、最も広い範囲の自由が要求さるべきもの。即ち結婚が、今日の如く個人的の狭い知縁や、仲人や、私立媒介所やの、封建的様式によってされるといふのは、驚くべき不可解の事実である。

A literal translation in which one attempts to render every word of this sentence would look something like this:

Concerning that choice [to marry], [it is] a thing in which the freedom [to choose from] the widest possible range is demanded. In other words, the fact that marriages—like our own time—are carried out in a feudalistic form [by one's] individual [and] narrow circle of relations, matchmakers, private mediators, etc. is a surprising [and] incomprehensible fact.

While this translation conveys the meaning of the original, it is unpleasant to read.

An effective aphorism cuts straight to the point and should, ideally, immediately catch the reader's attention. As Walter Benjamin writes, "Fidelity in the translation of individual words can almost never fully reproduce the meaning they have in the original."<sup>54</sup> Thus, I was determined to translate less literally—not only to avoid verbiage like the above, but to capture the feeling underlying the text rather than the meaning of the words. My own translations reads:

When it comes to the decision to marry, the greatest possible freedom to choose is necessary. Today's style of marriage, arranged in a feudalistic manner by one's narrow circle of relations or a matchmaker or some other private intermediary, is shockingly inexplicable.

Here, I did not hesitate to cut "in other words" (*sunawachi*), for example, and I thought that the phrase "shockingly inexplicable" conveyed the sense behind Sakutarō's lengthier *odoroku beki fukakai no jijitsu de aru* without being as wordy as the original. Throughout the translation process, it was a considerable challenge to balance being

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 21.

faithful to the Japanese text while nevertheless crafting a prose style that readers of English would appreciate.

While the question of genre and achieving an eloquent style in English posed the most difficult challenges to me during the translation of *FFD*, there were other problems as well. One difficulty was coping with the vast number of allusions and references within the text. A distinctive quality of aphoristic authors is that they examine all aspects of life from multiple angles. Consequently, it is not uncommon for them to draw upon their erudition to examine life from the perspective of a diverse range of fields. Sakutarō is no exception: within *FFD* alone, the author references fields as varied as literature (spanning numerous eras and cultures), religion (especially Christianity and Buddhism), philosophy, psychology, theater, music, history, politics, science, and medicine. Consequently, one of the most time-consuming aspects of the translation process was researching some of the issues that preoccupied Sakutarō in his aphorisms.

Early on in the translation process, I considered using footnotes to clarify Sakutarō's references and allusions. However, I ultimately decided against this: for the same reason that I ruled in favor of a less literal translation for the sake of eloquence, I concluded that footnotes would bog the reader down with unnecessary information—a risk which might compromise enjoyment of the aphorisms themselves. My goal was not to create a scholarly text but a readable and engaging one. I also reasoned that, in the age of nearly instantaneous access to information via the Internet, interested readers could research on their own time some of the references in *FFD* if so inclined.

In some sections, however, I did find it necessary to add some clarification to the original. As I discussed in Section 2, Sakutarō was just as keenly interested in issues



occupying his particular era as he was in more historical or universal ones during the composition of *FFD* in the 1930s: thus, sometimes he discusses topics that, while immediately recognizable to his contemporaries, seem less relevant or puzzling to contemporary readers. While initially reluctant to modify the original text, I ultimately favored adding clarification in certain sections, such as *FFD* 8 ("How the Bluestockings Fought") and 23 ("The Family (The Pathos of the Father)"). Regarding the former, I chose to add a brief explanation in the text that Sakutarō's "Bluestockings" refers to members of Japan's feminist movement. Having never previously encountered the term before, I ruled in favor of defining the term for the reader.

In *FFD* 23, Sakutarō alludes to the character Nora, from Ibsen's play *A Doll's House*. While this play is still famous today, it was even more so among intellectuals of Sakutarō's generation: thus, his contemporaries would immediately know who Nora was. While perhaps there was not as urgent a need for clarification here as the reference to the Bluestockings, I chose to translate the original as "Ibsen's Nora" so that readers will know that Sakutarō is making an allusion to an Ibsen character. For the vast majority of allusions within *FFD*, however, I chose not to add any supplementary information, as I thought that such additional clarification, while perhaps of interest to some, would ultimately not influence the reader's enjoyment of the text.

Concerning the translation process, José Ortega y Gasset writes: "An author of a book . . . has used his native tongue with prodigious skill, achieving two things that seem impossible to reconcile: simply to be intelligible and, at the same time, to modify the ordinary usage of language. This dual operation is more difficult to achieve than walking

a tightrope. How can we demand it of the average translator?"<sup>55</sup> As an average translator, I cannot possibly have done full justice to a text like Sakutarō's *The Flight from Despair*. However, I hope that I have at least communicated some of the beauty of the original's prose and the profundity of Sakutarō's thought to the reader.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 51.

## CHAPTER 2

### *THE FLIGHT FROM DESPAIR*

#### **Preface**

Since beginning my career as a poet, I have continued to write two kinds of literature. On the one hand is my lyric poetry—like *Howling at the Moon* and *The Blue Cat*—and on the other hand are my aphorisms, like *Fresh Passions* and *The Justice of Delusions*. My lyric poetry and aphorisms reveal my inner life. Although these two genres differ in form, I believe that they are nevertheless analogous because they are both forms of expression in which the same poetic spirit resides. To put it another way, together with my lyric poetry my aphorisms—which to me are basically "idea-verse"—constitute my poetic existence.

In my everyday life, lyric poetry is my nighttime; idea-verse, my daytime. The self that creates lyric poetry is tormented in his nocturnal visions by terrifying demons, or walks through towns reflected by a magic lantern in which blue cats dwell. The world that I see in my dreams teems with all kinds of hallucinations and visions; it is unintelligible to the commonsense of daytime. At times, things so astonishing as to be beyond the comprehension of a sane state of mind appear as phenomena in my dreams. Thus, as a lyricist, I was a sort of somnambulant. Of course, my dream-visions did not extend beyond what already existed as latent images in my mind. If you dissect dreams scientifically, the entirety of one's mental processes becomes crystal-clear. Dreams are

the most sincere confessions of one's soul. Consequently, the world reveres this kind of literature in which the soul bares itself as the pinnacle of lyric poetry.

However, during the day I would recover my rationality without fail. While dreams constitute one's unconscious world, the world of reality is one in which one's rational consciousness invariably reigns supreme. For a poet, there is nothing so painful and agonizing as this quotidian, conscious existence. No matter what position he occupies in society, the poet is a martyr. The poet is constantly in search of apparitions of beauty as he wanders through his nocturnal visions. He does not do this for pleasure; rather, plagued by the unbearable agonies of real-world existence, the poet is inexorably driven to flight. Hence, during the hours in which he cannot create poetry—that period of time in which he has regained the consciousness of daylight—the poet is like a rodent driven out of its lair, ceaselessly in terror of the unease and fretfulness its surroundings engender. If this kind of creature were to possess a modicum of rationality, it would inevitably come to voice its skepticism—that preeminent factor of human existence in which tragedy ensues.

In light of this, one side of the poet always possesses the guise of the philosopher. Lyricist at night and a creator of idea-verse in the morning—these two sides are compatible in the world. The titles of poet and essayist or of poet and cultural critic are synonymous. For the poet, this is inexorable fate, a necessarily tragic and recurring cycle. Poets are not designated "leaders of culture" because of their prestige; rather, they earn that title on account of their accursed fate. My role as an essayist and creator of idea-verse is in fact quite irritating and disheartening to me. The only time I truly savor is that time in which I glimpse apparitions of beauty among nocturnal images—that time in

which I create lyric poetry. But that time is evanescent; it fades instantaneously and is difficult to grasp. And so the long hours of daylight, the time in which one's consciousness is alert, continue unremittingly. Thus, I had no choice but to conceive of *The Flight from Despair*.

Six years have already elapsed since I published my last collection of aphorisms, *The Justice of Delusions*. I have at last assembled and published in this one volume the spontaneous fragments that I have recorded in my notebook during this time. It is from my everyday existence that I have unearthed the pensées of this volume. In particular, the majority of these topics revealed themselves to me during meditative walks outside of my home—in the streets, in the woods, in trains, in department stores, in coffee shops, and in movie theaters. Just as a painter always walks with sketchbook in hand, I too carry a notebook on my person at all times and record my impressions wherever I may be. Thus, in one sense this volume is a record of my daily existence and akin to a diary. However, my diary differs from the usual kind in that I omit the individual particulars of my quotidian existence, instead attempting only to intuit the universal meanings that are intimated behind those particulars. My friend Murō Saisei, evaluating my collection of poetry *Isles of Ice*, said it was much like a novel; in the same way, perhaps this volume might be a kind of novel as well.

Hagiwara Sakutarō

1935

## On the Second Edition

In the preface to the first edition, I said that the relationship of my lyric poetry to my idea-verse (or essays) is like night and day. However, that is not to say at all that these two genres are antipodal; in fact, they are in close correlation with each other. To put it more exactly, just as one's dreams at night are unconscious reflections of one's daytime existence, the images and notions that appear in my lyrics are all reflections of those contemplative hours in which I reason. Thus, *The Flight from Despair*, together with my previous book *The Justice of Delusions*, expounds the essential intellectual background that lies behind the lyricism of my poetic works like *Isles of Ice* and *The Blue Cat*. In other words, both the nihilistic despondency of the vagrant which is the motif of *Isles of Ice* as well as the Schopenhauer-like, Theravadic ennui and pessimistic sensibility that characterize *The Blue Cat* trace their roots to my volumes of prose.

It is in this sense that my lyric poetry and my idea-verse possess the relationship of night to day, of dreams to consciousness. Those who read only my lyrics know the world of my dreams, but remain ignorant of the daytime world of reality from which those dreams sprung. Conversely, those who read only my idea-verse become familiar with my quotidian existence, but remain unaware of the phantasmagorical images that drift in my unconsciousness. As an author, it is my hope to find readers who will become acquainted with both these worlds. The reader who can correctly piece together the selves of both worlds—the lyric-poet and the idea-poet—will come to know me in my entirety, and this kind of reader is the most gratifying of all to the author. I used this occasion of republication to point this out, as I neglected to do so in the preface to the first edition.

## **Chapter 1: Women – Marriage – Love**

### **1. Marriage Under Surveillance**

Malicious eyes peep from behind the sliding door. Even at night in one's bedroom, one cannot escape supervision because of the cracks between the unlocked doors. How constrained and pitiful young Japanese couples are, incapable of a single kiss because they are always under the scrutiny of mothers-in-law and siblings-in-law both day and night, as soon as they awake and as soon as they go to sleep! But in fact the meaning behind this system is more profound than meets the eye, as underlying it all is Eastern thoughtfulness and discretion. First, this system prevents young couples from engaging in the kind of wild sexual activity that should be taboo, opting in favor of moderation. Second, this system obviates a critical danger at the heart of married life—the risk of couples becoming too close—by prescribing a more decorous path.

A newly-wed woman who is incessantly under the malicious surveillance of her mother- and sisters-in-law will inevitably reach out for the warm hands of her husband, who is her sole trustworthy benefactor. In turn, the man will want to protect his wife, pitiable and sweet as she is. Even if the woman is lackluster, the man will want to protect his wife from her persecutors out of a sense of humane morality. The wife, who would normally have sound reason to seek divorce under normal circumstances, is bound to her husband in this case through moral duty. This bond will ultimately blossom into genuine love. A man and woman that make trysts like thieves in the night, surreptitiously evading ubiquitous observation as they smile and kiss—a couple like this likely knows the zenith

of happiness in this world. In contrast to the tragedy of Westerners, who quickly weary of married life because they indiscriminately enjoy the pleasures of sexual intercourse with abandon, we Japanese possess a happier institution with a far higher rate of success.

The Eastern family structure, looked at from a utilitarian perspective, is by no means contemptible.

## **2. Marriage as an Ideal**

To think that you can randomly unite one man and one woman and hope for a flawless marriage to result is more absurd and nonsensical than pounding arbitrarily on two piano keys and expecting a harmonious melody. Despite this, however, in many cases the matter is resolved owing to the intrinsic flexibility of the woman, who is able to adapt herself to her partner and circumstances, thus transforming herself into someone else. Parents, in the old system of education, would carefully shelter their daughters in order to prepare them for married life, raising them to be blank sheets devoid of individuality and thus more receptive to other colors. Just as the girls were beginning to come of age—sixteen or seventeen—parents would marry them off. Thus, in the past women easily adapted to their husbands, both sexually and temperamentally. And this former kind of marriage was successful.

But in our present system of education, we instill women with learning and a conception of the self while they are still young, thus nipping the bud of this flexible nature. Marriages today no longer succeed like they did in the past. Women, in the same way as men, choose their partners based on their own preferences, opting to seek out to



the ends of the earth the *ideal* husband—Plato's so-called "other half," that single man who alone counts among millions of others. Of course, in reality this "other half" is a mere metaphysical concept. Thus they fruitlessly grow old, pass by the age in which they could have married, and end up as old spinsters. The tragedy of today's world is that everywhere the ideal of marriage exists but not its practical implementation.

### **3. Marriage as Vassalage**

To think that today one has the freedom of choice to marry is a form of delusion in which one is oblivious to what the word freedom means. It is no different than thinking that one has the freedom of choosing what to read in a tiny library of five books. There is not a single book one would want to read in such a library. Thus, people are compelled to pick one book among the worthless lot—a situation imposed on them from the start. If one had the freedom to go to a larger library, absolutely no one would have chosen that book. The most serious injustice within today's system is that society restricts the liberty to seek marriage and ultimately compels one's choice. So much so that if this kind of marriage is not a form of slavery, I do not know what is.

### **4. A Proposal for Nationalized Marriage**

When it comes to the decision to marry, the greatest possible freedom to choose is necessary. Today's style of marriage, arranged in a feudalistic manner by one's narrow circle of relations or a matchmaker or some other private intermediary, is shockingly

inexplicable. So, why do people not turn this into a nationalized institution? The government will record information about everyone seeking marriage just like a census and keep this information in lists at town halls throughout the nation. Since everyone's information will be indexed in this way, those seeking a spouse can know everything about the person in question—physical appearance (through a photo), social status, assets, expectations, conditions, temperament, and so forth—and consequently will be able to choose a suitable partner of their own volition. On a nationwide scale, one's freedom of choice is vast: one can search for the ideal match among millions of people throughout Japan. In contrast, a person seeking marriage today is confined to an extremely limited circle of personal relations and is forced to pin all his hopes on one adventitious lot. Merely because destiny failed to bring two people together, how many hundreds and thousands of potentially suitable partners died ignorant of each other! Nor is it fate that imposed this tragedy: the cause lies with an imperfect human society that slavishly entrusts everything to fate. We must rectify this: from the hands of the individual to the hands of the state! From marriages brokered by individuals to marriages managed by the state! If the people wish for this, the state will no doubt comply. The problem is simple: till now no one has bothered to make the proposal.

## **5. Marriage and Divine Providence**

Christianity posits the following concerning monogamous marriage: "Those bound under heaven shall not part on the earth."

In other words, marriage is like this: out of the millions born into this world, one man and one woman, having met entirely through coincidence, must fall in love and be united. As this "coincidence" is so miraculous as to be inconceivable to human beings, it must therefore be a union according to providence—a match made according to God's will. Since this union came about under the auspices of heaven, human beings may not divorce.

Suppose a man has bought a pair of shoes that are too small. However, the law forces him to bear the burden of his mistake, and thus he may not sell or change the shoes in question until his death. The Church's fatalistic view of marriage is no different from this. Surely it is an extraordinary coincidence to pick out the right pair of shoes out of a practically infinite number of them. To put it in Christian terms, God's sacred providence foresaw and ordained that this particular pair of shoes fall into the hands of the man in question. Thus, unable to change his shoes, the man has no choice but to endure his discomfort for a lifetime.

Buddhism is even worse, as it conceives of marriage in terms of karma. According to Buddhism, once someone has made a mistake, it will be punished through every single one of that person's future incarnations for all of eternity. A poor marriage that turns out to be a mistake, even after its annulment, will influence one's bloodline as well; and if one has no descendants, karma will still cast its caliginous shadow over that person's life. What a terrifying thought: it is so severe as to make my hair stand on end.

According to the above, all religions castigate one's "mistake." What "mistake"? It is none other than the destiny that inexorably results when all people marry; it is, truly, God's gracious providence.

## **6. Working Women**

Until quite recently, working women were the darlings of the modern age. Spirited and vivacious, these young professional women radiated the charm befitting a modern lady. More importantly, however, is that the source of this charm lay in the sentimentality of all men of gentle spirit. "That such delicate women," many men thought, "can nevertheless so gallantly and courageously stand in the vanguard of the working world!" They would then weep out of sympathy or even fall in love.

However, this state of affairs has started to change. In today's society, many unemployed men glare at working women with eyes of hostility and jealousy. "Even though they are women," they say, "they have the nerve to encroach on our territory and whisk away our jobs! They should act in a way that befits women: if they stayed at home, tied up their hair, and did knitting or what have you, they would all be far more endearing." Working women have lost their aura of romance and coquetry. No longer the darlings of the modern age, they are now mere economic existences dwelling among pitiless back streets, no different from the wife of a greengrocer or some other such nonentity.

## **7. Women's Sworn Enemy**

What men generally seek in the opposite sex are the physical or temperamental characteristics that they themselves lack—curvaceousness, voluptuousness, lighter skin,

charm, gracefulness, tenderness, and so on—for natural instinct compels us to complement each other's deficiencies. This is in accordance with nature's principles.

In women, however, we see the reverse. In fact, it seems like women generally tend to display the opposite tendency to men when they search for a partner. In this respect, strangely, women appear to overturn nature's laws. Many women, in fact, do not love brawny and stouthearted men, and they are instead prone to feel a natural attraction towards feminine men who are more akin to themselves—men with gentler dispositions and lighter, delicate skin. Thus, if a beautiful woman were to cleverly disguise herself as a man without any risk of detection, she would probably become an idol in the world of women. It is certainly true that women tend to not sense beauty in what they lack and gravitate instead towards others with the same characteristics.

Just what is the origin of this kind of warped love that runs contrary to nature's laws? Perhaps it has to do with the fact that men have oppressed women for so long. For much of history, what men have demanded from women is not mutual affection; rather, it is the slavish obedience that one shows to those in power. Consequently, in order to restore the freedom to love that had been so cruelly taken from them, women began to feel affection not towards "masculine" men, but to a different kind of man—the feminine man. The reason is that this kind of gentle, mild man, being of a different species from women's terrifying oppressors, was always capable of being a faithful friend. For such love was equal from the beginning, devoid of any obligation to submit to another, and was tightly bound through a free, mutual affection.

These historical circumstances also explain why prostitutes, miserable and oppressed as they are, shun men in society who are healthy or possess upstanding natures,

choosing instead to love society's dregs: vagrants, delinquents, murderers, the handicapped, and drunkards. To these women, all men are oppressors and despicable tyrants. Only society's criminals and their ilk are capable of sharing mutual love with them; they alone are their sole lovers.

Women in general, owing to history's adverse circumstances, fear all men, being captivated only by beautiful men most similar to themselves. We see this tendency particular in Eastern countries, where women have experienced the harshest oppression for the longest time. In Japan's Edo-period drama and artwork, artists consistently depict a woman's lover as a feminine man. On the other hand, how often in kabuki a stereotypically "brawny" man with a dark complexion occupies the role of tyrannical oppressor!

## **8. How the Bluestockings Fought**

Bluestockings—Japanese feminists who were the so-called "new women" of their age—out of an intense vindictive passion, clamored for the liberation of women. They said that in all matters—politics, economics, the household—women were men's equals and deserved the same rights. Today, most of their demands have been realized or are in the process of being so. It is fair to say that the Bluestockings were pioneers in their time. Unfortunately, however, their thinking is fundamentally mistaken in one respect. These "new women" would often go into hysterics, storming through stores that sell women's hats or cosmetics or cursing any woman on the street who was dressed up. Their justification is that they wanted to preach the contemptibility of women dressing up to be

the willing playthings of men. In the same line of thinking, they also rejected all aspects that made women seem like dolls to men: sweetness, modesty, coquetry, and so on. Thus, they themselves eliminated all feminine beauty and charm and made the absence of these qualities into a noble symbol of the feminists. To put it another way, they turned "being female" into something disgraceful and humiliating. What obvious truth the Bluestockings strangely did not realize, however, is that tossing out the feminine was not commensurate with the attainment of rights—to the contrary, it was a fatal renunciation of them. These stiff and cold old spinsters, precisely because of their masculine build and temperament, realized that they themselves would never become objects of male adoration, and out of a subjective and jealous resentment they tied their lot in life with the justice of the feminist movement, thus willing a twofold revenge against the tyranny of men.

## **9. The Coincidence of Love**

Love is a kind of business transaction. In such a transaction, one must trade something one does not need for something one does, with the value of the items and exchange being equal. In love, also, two people—someone who loves and someone who is loved—must discover what is ideal in each other; if their interests or feelings do not coincide, the relationship will fail. However, love, unlike a business transaction, does not possess a useful currency—one concrete thing you can exchange for another. The fact that love does not possess an intermediary currency makes it similar to the barter system of primitive societies. Suppose someone wants to exchange his cow for some rice in this

inconvenient kind of market. At precisely that time he must find someone who desires the exact opposite. If this "coincidental someone" does not materialize, he has no choice but to go home in vain, his cow sadly trailing behind him.

In the case of love, people submit various demands. Each person insists on a hundred different kinds of likes and dislikes even with respect to the other person's physical appearance. And, if someone does not feel some kind of subjective charm on one point, he or she will absolutely not fall in love. What is crucial is that the demands do not come only from one party; both people must mesh firmly together—they must be united perfectly on a single point by coincidence. And this "coincidence" might occur once out of a hundred times. In most cases, the form of a relationship is predetermined. In other words, one person falls in love with another who will respond with aversion. Unrequited love is the norm in all relationships. The sheer number of such unions proves that this is a mathematical axiom.

"The mystery of human existence is that without fail the person whom you love responds with hate, and the person that you hate responds with love." So a certain fool of a poet once mused and heaved a sigh.

## **10. Marriage as Medicine**

Western marriages (that is, those in which you marry someone you love) result from an appetite naturally stimulated by the food's aroma, color, shape, and seemingly tasty exterior. Eastern marriages, on the other hand, lack this external charm, opting instead to stress the food's nutritional value—how many calories and vitamins it actually



possesses. Eastern marriages are fundamentally devoid of any romantic aspect. Nevertheless, this utilitarian approach means that people usually need not suffer the pain of divorce, as the success rate of this kind of marriage is far higher. But, how is it that people are able to endure and swallow this merely nutritious kind of marriage—a medicinal marriage—that is utterly bereft of the stimulation of one's appetite that would get one's gastric juices flowing? Here the Eastern emphasis on family—particularly one under the strict authority of a patriarch or matriarch—comes into play. These "affectionate" parents, paying no heed to the children's own will, do not hesitate to make them swallow bitter medicine. By nature, children will run away helter-skelter, bawl - anything to avoid swallowing it. But their parents, with the wisdom of years, know well the efficacy of such medicine—that it will surely give the children a happier future, with a moment's bitter pain giving way to more successful times ahead. Thus, the heads of families, using their absolute authority, do not let their children run free. Later on in life, their tyrannized children will come to understand the kindness of their parents.

## **11. The Age of Exhibitionism**

Exhibitionism, in its parading of embarrassing behavior, reveals an eagerness to be insulted or ridiculed by the opposite sex. In the case of men, exhibitionism is one kind of masochism. In the case of women, however, exhibitionism, owing to its erotic appeal, reveals the intent to arouse, excite, or agitate men, and therefore it is a kind of sadistic behavior. Thus, the male exhibitionist flagrantly puts on his act in a public space, while the female exhibitionist casually exposes herself as if it were an accident.

In today's age of exhibitionism, women casually shed more and more clothing under the pretext of fashion; soon enough they will be practically naked. Who knows what this portends for us men.

## **12. Male Chastity**

A debate over "male chastity" is no different from bickering in court over the legal consequences of a sexual debacle: if a woman persuades a man to sleep with her, no issue results, but if the roles are reversed, suddenly it becomes a criminal case. When particularly fearsome women (feminists, members of the temperance union, and so on) support male chastity, they approve so passionately mainly in response to the display of male masochism. The more these ladies become serious and heated over the topic, the more humorous and charming it is, to the point that it makes life somewhat more amusing.

## **13. Scruffiness**

Scruffiness stimulates a woman's maternal love—that form of love in which one busily tries to take care of and look after one's messy children. So being scruffy is one more strategy in the lady-killer's arsenal.

## **14. Women and Pessimism**

According to Schopenhauer's philosophy, love is a crafty scam of nature. Love lures human beings with its sweet fragrance, leading them into bearing children and making a family; in other words, duping them into taking on life's most excruciating burdens. In the modern age, the clever among us fall in love but avoid reproduction, eating the fruit but spitting out the pit in an attempt to thwart the swindler that is nature. And if these fellows succeed in their aims and the whole human race eventually goes extinct, we pessimists will raise a resounding cheer! However, the desire of women to become mothers is commensurate with the instinct of women to fall in love. The intensity of this instinct will overpower a trifling defense like a condom; all women will procreate. They *will* procreate. And therefore absolutely no woman will ever affirm philosophical pessimism.

## **15. The City's Prayer**

In our age, "angel" signifies a prostitute. Religion is not dead, but its form has changed.

Oh, merciful Saint Mary! Just like in the past, once again grant us your eternal protection. Amen.

## **16. Lessons from my Ex-Wife: Part I (Dreadful Ignorance)**

My ex-wife taught me one thing alone: You digest food with your stomach, not with your mind. At dinnertime, she would always say this in a livelier fashion: "Stop spacing out, and eat your damn food!"

## **17. Lessons from my Ex-Wife: Part II**

My ex-wife was always furious with me. If I greeted our neighbor's maid in the morning, she would throw a fit, claiming that this was proof of my unfaithful heart—inexcusable for a husband! Upon hearing my excuses, she would always say, "You're always sullenly silent; you don't talk to anybody. There's no way you would just start chatting up a storm this morning!" Following this, I would carefully try to uphold my daily habits. Since to go outside my daily routine portended a result more terrifying than leaping off a ship's deck, I became terrified with novelty in all its forms. And, sure enough, I was ultimately disciplined into becoming an ordinary, sensible, and steadfast "innocuous human being."

## **18. Women are Virtuous for Eternity**

Women did not choose to become tomboys; men encouraged them to do so. Women did not start wearing their hair short because they themselves wanted to; it is because men found that style attractive. Nor did women develop a strong sense of self of

their own volition; men chose to educate them because particular societal conditions made it necessary to do so. In all future centuries, women will not change unless men will it. In the modern household, that unique phenomenon that continues to become more and more prominent—I am referring to that of the hen-pecked husband—exists, in fact, because modern men themselves wished for it. Even the feminist movement that the Bluestockings were at the vanguard of was a paradox: it was merely feminine virtue that conformed to the will of men. Oh women—eternally passive, unable to evolve by your own will! Sweet creatures—as you become more and more tom-boyish and impertinent, you become even more adorable.

## **19. The Lies of Misogynists**

When men, spitting in disgust, cruelly expose and specify every flaw that a woman possesses—her stupidity, her selfishness, her jealousy, her frivolousness, her hysteria, her untamable savagery, and so on—it is, in fact, an indication of sexual interest. An honest analysis will reveal, in fact, that a true misogynist is nowhere to be found. Even a man like Schopenhauer—it is quite clear just what kind of fellow he was.

## **20. An Optimal Marriage**

"A man should not get married"—so Priest Kenkō concludes in his *Tsurezuregusa*. "No matter how nice the woman, seeing her day after day will inevitably lead to disgust." Then, he suggests a new kind of marriage in which a couple live separately: "If you see

each other only occasionally, you will not grow sick of each other with the passing of time. If the man comes and stays with the woman now and then, the relationship will remain fresh." As a matter of fact, this kind of marital relationship has existed in Japan since ancient times. During the Nara period, a couple would live apart, with the man occasionally visiting the woman. As one can see in the poetry of the *Man'yōshū*, they refer to one's wife as *imo* (one's sister). In reality, *imo* referred to one's lover. In that age, once a week (occasionally more frequently), they would surreptitiously make a tryst. People would laugh at a couple's antics to be secretive, and couples were often the butt of comedy in society. The tedium that plagues so many marriages simply did not exist. Today, also, there is only one kind of "optimal marriage": rather than a wife, get a girlfriend.

## **21. Goethe's Mistake**

Men who are timid and weak at heart, despising the high-handedness and cunning of some women, frequently go out of their way to marry women who are simple and ignorant. However, they forget that the whip is indispensable to tame an ignorant and uncultured creature. However, it is doubtful that these kinds of men—timid, weak, and terrified of women's cruelty—know the first thing about using the whip. Goethe is a fine example of a man whose marriage was foiled in this fashion.

## **22. Why Women are Necessary**

The necessity of women has nothing to do with reproduction, nor with raising children or doing housework. The true necessity of women stems from men's subjective impressions of them. Fashionable clothes, new ways of living, profound philosophies, poetry and novels filled with dreams, beautiful artwork—all of these are the result of these subjective impressions. Consequently, culture is ceaselessly evolving, and society is in a constant state of flux. The duty of women will always be to keep changing their makeup.

## **23. The Family (The Pathos of the Father)**

Today's tragedy is that the *concept* of "the family" is alive and well, but in reality it is a dead institution. Today's young people, as soon as they hear the word "family," sense the gloom of long-gone feudalism. A certain young lady of a good family who ran away from home, in response to a policeman who lectured her, said: "The family is obsolete!"

In the nineteenth century, Ibsen's Nora abandoned her home; and in the twentieth century, Nora's daughter will do the same. The one left at home is always the forlorn father. In our age, surely the father is the most tragic figure of them all.

## **24. Why Does the Reverse Not Occur?**

A most natural sequence of associations is to infer marriage from love, obscenity from marriage, and boredom from obscenity. But, the fact that one cannot infer the opposite sequence (love from boredom) is quite mysterious from the perspective of psychology. Were it possible, prose would have come into existence before the advent of poetry, and history would have been repudiated before life as we know it ever took form.

## **25. Platonic Love (Female Irony)**

Platonic love (in the case of men) refers to a lofty love so pure that it is bereft of all carnal passion. In the case of women, however, a touch of obscenity is implicit in the words "platonic love." To quote one middle-aged woman, "When I hear 'platonic love,' it is like inhaling the dirty stench of women's socks soaked with sweat." I wonder why this is so.

## **26. The Metaphysics of Love**

The psychological mechanism of love is to contemplate the metaphysical "thing itself" that lies behind the phenomenal woman.



## **27. Love in Old Age**

In many cases the maternal instinct underlies the eroticism of women. Besides its physiological cravings, this instinct also possesses spiritual and moral aspects. Men also feel this same kind of love: upon reaching a certain age, men frequently feel a kind of spiritual love that is directed towards young women only, the reason being that the yearning for spiritual love gradually increases in inverse proportion to the decline of sexual desire. The eroticism of old men begins to stir in response to the paternal and humane caresses of young women. Mature, middle-aged women usually make old men uneasy because they directly provoke lust. Innocent young girls, on the other hand, seem "lovable" to old men, and consequently engender platonic love. Half of this love is physical; half is paternal instinct. The protagonist of *Les Misérables*, who blesses the marriage of the young woman he loves while weeping with grief inside, is a paradigm of the man who understands the purest kind of love that exists in this world. Surely there is nothing so sublime and beautiful as the love of men in old age. Thus, it is only in his eighties that Goethe wrote his most beautiful love poems.

## **28. Modern Love (The Heart of Poetry)**

The man was a businessman ("a busy man"); the woman, a businesswoman ("a busy woman"). The two fell in love in an elevator, wrote letters to each other using their typewriters, and became engaged on a train. Eventually they had a family. Day in and day

out they spoke only of their work in the office. Besides business-related conversation, they did not exchange a single romantic word.

I did not sketch the above story, which could be the basis for some novel or the other, to delineate the limitations of contemporary marriage. I wrote it only to indicate the possibility of a new kind of modern poetry that lies latent in contemporary marriage.

### **29. On Elegant Love**

All love is elegant. In this new age, however, elegance itself is becoming more and more business-like. The lovers of today make their assignations on elevators and speak of love while riding trains. Without the milieu of crowds, noise, business, traffic congestion, and whirling machines, they are incapable of experiencing the joy of love. They become engrossed in the tenderness of sweet love only while busily counting the hours and seconds of every day with their wristwatches. Love: the busier it is, the more pleasant it becomes. Behind this backdrop of contemporary love, however, we poets gaze at the infinitely serene blue sky. Within the cities clamoring with the noise of machines, we look up at the sky and are surprised to feel the kind of elegant love, unchanged from ages past, that characterizes the pastoral.

### **30. Today's Problem**

Should love take the form of German sentimentalism? Or should it become the business-like arrangement that one sees in America? A problem worthy of contemplation.

### **31. Marriage and Literature**

The advantage of marriage is that it helps one to perceive the true nature of women; the disadvantage is that it makes one disillusioned with them. Consequently, unmarried novelists are unable to write about women. A married poet, on the other hand, is no longer able to sing about them.

### **32. Formidable Women**

The fact that women feel embarrassed over being naked has nothing to do with exposure itself; rather, they feel ashamed because it is against societal conventions (good manners, to put it simply). If nudity is in fashion, women will proudly and without any scruples walk about in a city's busiest quarters in clothes that leave little to the imagination. The women one sees at the beach who are almost completely naked are proud to stand at the forefront of fashion; in fact, being in more conservative clothes would be a source of shame.

If society changes someday so that it is good behavior and etiquette to, for example, unashamedly bare one's emotions or to speak publicly about the secrets of eroticism, women will no doubt surpass men one-hundred times over in boldness. Thereupon, if the spirit of literature and art becomes exhausted with "speaking of truth" in the foreseeable future, women will whisk away the position and genius of men to become courageous pioneers in their own right.

### 33. Venus

Diana only falls in love; Juno only procreates; and Minerva does neither. Venus, on the other hand, does both—she falls in love and she procreates. This explains why Venus is universally adored.

### 34. The Poignancy of Women

Remy de Gourmont says the following about what he calls the "poignancy" of women: "They innocently and humbly await husbands whom they have never seen nor heard of, unaware of when and where they will meet them."

When I see young women—so gentle, so anxious, so self-conscious—working earnestly at their needlework in the secluded rooms of their homes as they listen all day to the sparrow's songs, I recall vividly the words of that Catholic poet. I also recall a beautiful poem in Japanese written by my dear friend, Murō Saisei.

I wonder what you are hiding  
In that crimson box  
That lies on your charming desk.  
When you pass by the window  
Your eyes reflect the color of the box  
And your heart stirs.  
What is inside—is it a kind of soft ribbon?  
Or is it a tender poem  
That gives voice to a young girl's heart?

Young, unmarried women live in a world of fantasy. They are just like those samurai searching for opponents that are spoken of in Edo-period popular fiction. These

young, tragic samurai would wander aimlessly from province to province in search of a worthy adversary whom they had no idea when, where, and how they were supposed to meet, while praying over and over for a miracle to grant this chance meeting. After expending their lives on this exhausting quest, they would pass away.

The sweet young girls in that age would obsessively read these kinds of sad tales by the light of their paper lanterns, comparing the fate of the protagonists to their own. In the same way, today's young women absorb themselves in the twentieth-century equivalents of these same stories, secretly dreaming of future husbands while at the movies or the theater. Handsome young men dressed up like Rudolph Valentino or Hayashi Chōjirō appear in their dreams and poignantly stir their maiden hearts. With no specific expectations or plans, they pray for a fortuitous meeting, much like those samurai who would wander sad and lonely along roads rife with robbers or regions with nothing but bamboo grass and wayside shrines. Nevertheless, the writers of those old tales would end up granting the protagonists winning lots at the end of their unhappy peregrinations, ultimately allowing them to successfully fulfill their wishes.

But, if real life does not turn out like that . . . ! Ah, but real life has always been so. The poignancy of women is infinite.

## **Chapter 2: Will – Fate – Suicide – Revenge – Sex**

### **35. On the Copulation of Animals**

The copulation of cows radiates a tragic passion. The ox, tossing its head back, charges in from afar as swift as the wind. A single, terrifying, frantic moment—and then it is over. The copulation of dogs is hideous, long, and obscene. They mate in broad daylight on street corners, indifferent both to other dogs and human beings. I suppose they lack eroticism's elegance or delicacy (the origin of shame)—in other words, the quiet enjoyment of love's caresses that is immune to both jealousy and life's other cares. As for the human race, even in the prehistoric ages we would seek out private retreats within forests. In this respect, cats resemble humans in their possession of erotic refinement. Once they pass through love's first stages and are ready to begin their unsettling, grotesque duet, they invariably withdraw to a sequestered spot. Birds, however, surpass all other creatures in refinement. Copulation is brief—a mere second—but the stages leading up to it, in which they enjoy a courtship that is both elegant and romantic, can span the course of several hours or even a day. With regard to birds, I sense none of love's obscenity. It is a profound love that is delicate, artistic, even spiritual. The reason for human obscenity is that we are the descendents of apes rather than birds.

### **36. Memory and Life**

What if there were a man who had the pleasantest dreams night after night, only to forget them entirely upon waking up in the morning? And if this same man had nothing but grievances to voice against life? A "happy" man is one who recalls only the good moments from his life; the unhappy man recalls only the opposite. In general, the difference between optimists and pessimists stems from this particular psychological formula pertaining to the mechanism of memory.

### **37. The Seductiveness of Pessimism**

What other philosopher is as down-to-earth in his lecherousness as Arthur Schopenhauer? The core of his philosophy is inspired by the Upanishads and Theravada Buddhism. Thus, just as the Indians' abstinence and pessimism arose from the libidinal extremes of a tropical people, Schopenhauer's misogyny and pessimistic worldview stem from the melancholic pathology of the Indians. Schopenhauer's worldview is intrinsically connected with matters of the body (this is precisely why Nietzsche caustically christened his predecessor's philosophy "physiology"). Schopenhauer's "misogyny" is ironic. In reality, there is no other philosophy that teems with the same level of bewitching eroticism. From the internal organs that engendered such thoughts, we can hear the pessimist's flute echoing on spring nights and the lyrics of a will that bewails the worldly desires of men. What a melancholic and seductive pessimism!

### **38. The Birth of a Certain Worldview**

People whose desires are strong and whose wills burn fiercely yet nevertheless lack the courage to actually do anything attempt to find joy within themselves through opium-inspired hallucinations. However, this illusory world is nothing like reality—pale and built of symbols, it has all the solidity of a nebulous gas. The same people, once tossed back into daylight, feel the vulgarity of the work-a-day-world, to the point that, even if happiness, rare as it is, were to materialize before them, they would nevertheless cease to feel any satisfaction of the will. They become both spiritual and physical impotents. Ultimately they become convinced that the world is nothing more than the existence of will, and that all things exist as images that are phenomenal products of the will. The Indians are the exemplars of this kind of philosophy. Melting under tropical sultriness, they were incessantly plagued by violently materialistic and carnal desires. Moreover, they were indolent and thus utterly wanting when it came to any kind of practical activity. As a result, the Indians proclaimed the illusory nature of the universe and that all phenomena were mere delusions (*avidya*) generated by the will.

### **39. The Life of Indolence**

As for life's most important matters—marriage, choosing a vocation, and so on—human beings tend not to ponder them too deeply. In most cases, people make these decisions without reflection, letting things play out as they will according to fate. In contrast to this, when it comes to the trifling matters of everyday life—purchasing



furniture for one's house, for example—people will question their decisions over and over, exerting the utmost energy in careful deliberation. What is the reason for this contradiction? In the former instance, the matters at hand are extremely important and the circumstances often complicated. Precisely because marriage, for instance, is a matter of the utmost importance, it seems impossible to decide on a correct course of action no matter how much one thinks it through. Thus, people become fed up with thinking about these irritating things, ultimately resigning themselves to let things turn out as they will.

In this way, people generally resolve life's most urgent issues through laziness. When human beings do think, plan, and make the effort to do something, it is all inevitably directed towards the kind of simple issues that one encounters from day-to-day. This is why the anonymous writer of *Monogusa Tarō* cheerfully portrayed the eventual victory of its indolent protagonist.

#### **40. Nudity and Lust**

Some visitors to Africa wonder how the natives, making no effort to hide their nudity, are able to stimulate sexual desire. One study concludes that, similar to many animals, scent is the key. India's intellectuals in ancient times also prioritized smell. According to the *Kama Sutra*, the scent of the body was key to the aesthetic appreciation of women, and it even classifies different kinds of scents. The Indians used perfumed oil as an aphrodisiac and would bathe their dark bodies with this sharp-smelling perfume in order to stimulate the smell of the opposite sex. In addition, in ancient Greece the woman's naked body was praised as an object of beauty, especially in athletics. The

young women, entirely nude and glistening with sweat, would do calisthenics and other athletic activities in full sight of the men. However, at some point the men ceased to be sexually aroused through this because they grew too accustomed to the sight. They gradually lost interest in the opposite sex and, like Plato and Socrates, became obsessed with beautiful young men instead. This reached a point where the government found it necessary to compel marriage through law. In Greece, a beautiful nude woman was a kind of artistic object worthy of aesthetic appreciation. However, like the model in an artist's studio, she was not the object of sexual desire (the women one sees in Greek sculpture are virtually masculine).

In recent times, the fashion of women significantly exposing themselves seems to be gaining momentum. In fact, it is not only a fashion—scholars are encouraging this in light of studies in medicine and physical education. According to their new theories, this is a modern, "wholesome habit." No doubt, the habits of the ancient Greeks were wholesome. Their lust, however, was anything but.

#### **41. Clothing: Folds and Frills**

We must prohibit by law the habit of going out into public practically nude. This has nothing to do with morality. Rather, by growing acclimated to the sight, people will lose the subtle pastime of eroticism along with all its subtle nuances of aesthetic sensitivity and variegated flavors. When it comes down to it, is it even possible for a man to be attracted to a woman without any frills?

## **42. The Hallucinations of China**

The Chinese began taking opium more actively during the nineteenth century. The fact is hardly a cause for wonder. The Chinese who exist as images in our minds have been acquainted with it for thousands of years, since the dawn of their civilization.

## **43. Visiting Ashihara Shōgun**

The term "youth" refers to someone who is smugly convinced of his own capabilities despite being devoid of any actual talent. A certain kind of lunatic—the megalomaniac—still fundamentally possesses the aura of youth even in his eighties. The famous Ashihara Kinjirō—more famously known by his self-bestowed title of Ashihara "Shōgun"—still fancies himself today as the greatest hero under the heavens, as he strokes his graying beard in his mental hospital room.

In most cases, the word "youthful" has a satirical ring to it.

## **44. Chronicles of Defeat**

Those who write of victory are always *historians* under the firm control of the authorities. Those who write of defeats, on the other hand, are always *poets*. Besides a poet, who else is capable of understanding the profound pathos of defeat?

#### 45. The Cheerfulness of Suicide

There is nothing as buoyant and cheerful as a suicide note. Even people who normally possess no predilection for the arts will elatedly compose *waka* or some similar poem for the occasion. Even Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's testament has its fair share of facetiousness. Ikuta Shungetsu wrote the following in his: "A spear rusts, but one's reputation does not. The tiger leaves its pelt behind even after it dies, and the dead poet leaves his name." A group of young men, dancing along Mt. Mihara's crater, said to the crowd looking on, "Well gentlemen, we're off!" before leaping in one by one. The tragedy of suicide is the *process* leading up to the decision. Once one comes to a firm resolution, all gloominess vanishes. Suicide itself is cheerful; it even makes life joyful.

#### 46. Young Men and Arguing

To young men, arguing is not about intellectual criticism or inquiring into the subtle pros and cons of hefty decisions. What young men like about arguing (and, let us be honest, all young men enjoy arguing!) is the mock-battlefield involved in an argument's logic: they delight in the gallant technique of swordsmanship in which one stabs at the enemy, cuts him down, parries and evades the thrusts of the enemy—the kind of courageous elation a knight feels as he rides his horse into battle. The giddiness that comes from this abstract feeling—vaporous as it may be—fills them with euphoric pride. They particularly delight in using incomprehensible philosophical terminology and foreign neologisms—not because they have any interest in the meaning of these words,

but simply because they like the air of importance that seems to reside in them. Just as German students say that "Beer feeds one's enthusiasm," one can say, in the case of young men, that "Arguing feeds one's enthusiasm."

Let me relate an actual scene that I witnessed. Two young men, seated at a table in a certain bar, were arguing with each other. Both were quite drunk. Shouting at each other in thunderous voices, whatever they were arguing about was an inconsistent and incoherent muddle that lacked even a semblance of logic or demonstrable proofs. At the end of it all, they shook hands in joyful self-satisfaction and went home looking like the most spirited men of their generation. As I lingered at a table near the one they vacated, I mused to myself—just what is it that made them so proud?

#### **47. Chaplin and Intellectuals**

Charlie Chaplin's humor is paradoxical in that it shapes sadness into laughter. It is for this reason that intellectuals are so enamored of him. In contrast, the masses always delight in tragedy that is *not* paradoxical. In principle, they are sentimentalists who look for whatever is heart-rending in art; they are devoted to weeping. Intellectuals are the opposite; they scorn tearjerkers. Just like Japan's ancient samurai, they regard crying so readily as shameful. In response to the weepy masses, the intellectuals retort, "Just what is the true cause of tragedy?" In other words, intellectuals are always questioning the philosophical arguments underlying a tragedy. If they remain unconvinced of the work's validity, they will refuse to aver its worth.

However, Chaplin's method is to *not* openly show the outline of the tragedy. The tragedy remains hidden in the shadows and refuses to reveal itself. The masses who watch Chaplin simply enjoy laughing their heads off at the ridiculousness of the clown's acts. The *tragedy* of the work remains behind stage in a place inaccessible to the masses. Just like poetic expression, it is only hinted at; there is no explanation attached. Only those who have noticed that there is an element of pathos in the background can begin to analyze this aspect of the work. Nor is there a script in the movie to help one here—the viewer himself must ponder and deduce the tragedy on his own. Thus, intellectuals can enjoy two different kinds of pleasure. The first is the joy of solving the riddle that reveals the pathos of the work, and the second is the accompanying emotional satisfaction. Furthermore, intellectuals can feel the pride of being the only ones among the whooping masses who are clever enough to have figured out the tragic aspects of the work. In this way, intellectuals treat all hackneyed tragedies with derision. It is only in response to paradoxical tragedies that they are proud to shed tears and are ungrudging with their applause.

#### **48. A Prayer for Coincidence**

All things in human life result from one's hereditary characteristics and the environment one grows up in. For example, sickness occurs when someone who is genetically prone to that sickness encounters the relevant germs in his surroundings (modern medical science has verified this). In the same way, suicides and lunatics possess congenital characteristics that make them vulnerable, and suicide and madness

ensue when these people are placed in a particular environment. Women who become degenerate at a young age; the man who becomes Napoleon; those who become litterateurs, or beggars, or hobos, or revolutionaries—everyone is the same. If someone does not possess the corresponding hereditary characteristics, he will not kill himself or lose his mind no matter what circumstances he is exposed to. Whether someone will commit suicide or become mad is already determined from the moment he is born. From this perspective, human life is completely fatalistic. But, what if the would-be suicide grew up in a happy environment and never encountered unhappiness in his life? Or, in the same way, what if someone prone to a certain illness was lucky enough to never encounter the corresponding bacteria? Or if a man born to be a hobo grew up in prosperous circumstances?

In light of all this, it seems that every human life is an accident—a unique accident. For example, bacteria exist in unimaginable numbers everywhere on this planet, and human beings are obviously powerless to fend them all off. In our age, it is inconceivable that a single man could live his life without once being exposed to tuberculosis. Similarly, every human life is filled with all kinds of suffering. Even if one is born into an affluent family, one will still end up experiencing greater mental anguish. To some sensitive souls, the noise of the city alone is agonizing enough to drive them to suicide. It would be a miracle for someone vulnerable to suicide or madness to not once encounter the set of circumstances that would set off these hereditary predispositions. Or a man born to wander: even if were to grow up the son of an aristocrat or a billionaire, he would eventually leave home, throwing away his inheritance and inevitably joining the crowd of other vagabonds.

When one contemplates these kinds of deterministic conditions, the man who has faith in "coincidences" in human life is like someone expecting to win the lottery by buying national bonds or someone who expects to strike it rich in Shanghai's horse races. But, fear not: today's weather forecast still cannot predict tomorrow's weather with perfect accuracy. No matter how much science attempts to disprove chance, we still have the right to pray for it. O God—grant us the gift of coincidence!

(Contemporary research into the movement of electrons has revealed that coincidence *does* exist—albeit, on a negligible level . . .)

#### **49. Nietzsche's Causalism**

One of Nietzsche's desperate problems was to demonstrate the transcendence of the self in a seemingly deterministic universe (otherwise, his conception of the "genius" is a lost cause). In a passage called "At The Waterfall," Nietzsche muses how, when we see the millions of droplets swirling about in a waterfall, it is almost as if each droplet possesses a will of its own as they all disperse in infinitely different directions. But, in reality, the movement of each droplet is inevitably determined by the strict principles of physics. A single droplet of water does not dance by accident according to its free will.

Nietzsche, however, needed to find a way out of this impasse. He was obsessed with finding a free spirit (a genius) who could transcend his fate, unfettered by the inviolable laws of cause and effect that dominate the universe. This thought reached its conclusion with his conception of the *Übermensch*. Ah, the *Übermensch*!—A man



distinct from billions of others, the result of a truly miraculous coincidence. Among all humanity, he alone is free. The billions of other human beings are ruled by cause and effect, no different from the waterfall's droplets. Thus, human will and hope hinge on the sacrifice of the billions of men ruled by cause and effect, with their ultimate goal the birth of this unique man of chance—the *Übermensch*. Nietzsche's gamble was to bet all of human history on one side of a die with a nearly infinite number of sides. In the history of human thought, has there ever been such an audacious and universally heroic gamble?

## **50. A Life of Regrets**

If a human being does not want to feel regrets, it is best that he do nothing. Then again, a life in which one does nothing is essentially a life of regret.

## **51. The Indignation of the Rich**

Human beings overestimate the value of money. Listen to those who horde it and thus know exactly how powerless money is, just how meager and scanty the things one can obtain with it! If money were truly omnipotent, one could buy health, buy love, buy knowledge, buy freedom, and even buy happiness. But, in the end, one cannot buy anything of true worth with money. One often cannot even use money to satisfy one's desire for physical pleasures, let alone achieve peace of mind or contentment. The rich are perpetually poor, and they know the most desolate hunger in human existence.

"If only money were omnipotent!"—So the rich incessantly mourn. All rich men pray and fantasize unendingly about a world in which one can buy even non-physical things with money, like happiness: a world in which gold reigns supreme. But, most likely such an age will never materialize. When the rich man realizes that the woman he loves is indifferent to his money, he realizes the futility of his riches and ends up cursing human existence: "How is this possible? This kind of world is inconceivable!" When the rich man is afflicted with an incurable illness and lies near death, he furiously hurls all of his riches at the doctor: "What use is medicine!? This kind of world is inconceivable!"

The rich are always indignant. Moreover, their indignation is incomprehensible to the vast majority of people. This apathy of others makes them even more furious.

## **52. The Lives of the Poor**

The Japanese word *binbō* ("poor") gives the sense of a lifestyle that is gloomy and emanates the scent of musty dampness. The English word "poor" is different. Here, the image is of dry air and of houses built of stone and metal. One can interpret the word "poor" literally to mean a life of destitution or poverty: lacking the money to buy a single match, these "poor" live out their arid existences within their concrete houses. There is no equivalent word for *binbō* in English, and thus Westerners are incapable of understanding both its dark and gloomy nuances as well as its charming humbleness.

The Japanese may be the most *binbō* in the world. But they are absolutely not "poor." The *binbō* of our nation possess their own fair share of composure within their humble existences.

### **53. The Necessity of Illness**

Sometimes illness is necessary to simply force us to pick up a book.

### **54. The Contemporariness of Don Quixote**

Don Quixote, convinced that the humble serving girl at his inn was a princess of high birth, makes a ludicrous effort to treat her with the greatest of chivalrous courtesy. Her response? "You're out of your mind!" In the same way, poets like Goethe, Verlaine, and Baudelaire rushed about pursuing silly women of little significance, and, just like Don Quixote, they were all treated with contempt. In the case of Don Quixote, the woman he loves is to blame. If the object of his love were a princess living in an actual castle instead of a peasant or a kitchen maid, the story would no longer be a comedy. In Don Quixote's mind, reality is constantly being idealized and his world is a metaphysical one. What is amusing in his case is the simple naivety of one who does not understand reality as well as the enthusiasm of an overly-honest dreamer. The aforementioned poets like Baudelaire also possessed the dreamer's enthusiasm as well as the tendency to distort their individual realities. However, why is it that in their case we feel the pain of the tragic much more keenly than any kind of humor? The contemporary Don Quixote possesses the personality of the skeptic. He knows that the maid at the inn is in fact a maid, and he remains aware of the bankruptcy of his enthusiasms as he lives amidst all his falsehoods.

## **55. Dissipation as Revenge**

The dissipation of middle-aged men burns with the frenzied desire to attain the pleasures that were denied to them in their youth. It is a kind of tragic revenge: they gnash their teeth in frustration as they strive to get compensation for their wasted youth. In contrast, the dissipation of young men is simply the pursuit of pleasure that stems from biological impulses. Soon enough they will become cognizant of their own foolishness and give up their debauchery. Middle-aged men, on the other hand, are prepared to throw away *everything* in their desperate struggle. Until their revenge is complete, their dissipation will not end under any circumstances.

## **56. The Octopus**

An octopus closing in on its prey is quite frightening. Not relying on sharp weapons like claws, the octopus tightly coils itself around its prey using only its tentacles and sucking discs. Ah, and its prey! Just think of the extraordinary terror that visits the dreams of all those little sea creatures that will become the octopus's prey as they skitter about the ocean in fright.

## 57. The Principles of Fatalism

If a man wants to become rich, he will certainly be able to if he truly *wills* it. Men who build up fortunes within their lifetimes think incessantly about money from birth to death, and their entire will is directed towards the desire to possess things. In contrast, those who drag out their lives in poverty often possess a nature that is indifferent towards money, and they lack that fierce desire for possessions. In other words, they did not *will* themselves to become rich and thus were not able to do so.

As the above demonstrates, human will decides everything in life. If people truly will something, they are able to join the ranks of the successful without exception. However, if a man seems to lack this will, it means that somewhere within his desires there is actually a *different* will that furtively repudiates his superficial desires. For example, suppose a man sluggish and listless by nature endeavors to achieve success in society. Despite his resolve and enthusiasm, another will—the will, lying in the dark shadows in his heart, that yearns for inactivity and indolence—will thwart his efforts. This latter will is the authentic one. Although the man does not achieve success, he paradoxically has realized his true volition by passing through his existence in idleness and laziness (This kind of man is usually called "weak-willed." However, his will is in fact strong—perhaps not with respect to the desire to master his self, but towards the pursuit of indolence).

Thus, one can determine through this kind of reversal the cause from the result; one can know the *true* will that lies hidden in men's hearts. For example, think of a man who marries (seemingly through coincidence and contrary to his wishes) a prostitute or

some other such unsavory woman. On the surface, this man wanted, like ordinary men, a chaste and obedient wife. However, he ended up marrying such a hellcat because, somewhere deep in the shadows of his subconscious, he possessed a furtive sexual interest in precisely that sort of woman. In other words, his true will was in fact passionate in the pursuit of just such a marriage.

The city's hobos will forever remains hobos, and artists afflicted with loneliness and poverty will also remain so for eternity. In everything, the end result is determined by a single source: whether one is homeless or lonely or impoverished, everything hinges on one's will. A man is incapable of becoming anything if he does not will it. Even sickness and death occur when ennui exists in some corner of the subconscious. Sickness always strikes when one's will to live has fizzled out, and it occurs only in response to the will of people who are already weary of existence. The opposite also holds true: sickness never inflicts people who are brimming with vigor. All criminals are aware of this phenomenon. If a criminal is overflowing with the will to commit evil acts, he will easily evade capture by the police. When he ends up being thrown into prison, that is the moment when his will has faded; when he seriously feels the pangs of consciousness, it means he has grown senile. When this senility has settled in, this means in reality that the criminal's own will has directed itself towards surrendering to the law and towards repentance. The law, in response to this will alone, becomes responsible for his arrest.

Will determines *everything*. And fate? Fate is no more than a phenomenological formula that directs the course of the will in response to the circumstances of each individual existence. Despite the apparent diversity and complexity of human existence, the end result is already determined by the beginning. The final result is the consequence

of a formula that the will directs. Consequently, the "fortuity" of fate is an illusion. A certain fate will occur for the person who wills that fate, and it will not occur for the person who does not will it. Even people who fail in gambling and the stock market are the same: the fundamental reason is that they willed their failure and bet on the losing side.

### **58. The Birth of Tragedy**

Life's greatest unhappiness is that people are not cognizant of what they themselves truly wish for. Moreover, the vast majority of people strive to accomplish exactly what is antithetical to their own will.

### **59. Fathers**

Fathers are tragic for eternity.

### **60. Enemies**

One's enemies must always be bellowing with laughter. If not, whose ire would they provoke?

## 61. The Emotions of Objects

If a robot were to possess emotions, it would be the embodiment of infinite pathos.

## 62. Objects (A Lyric Poem)

Even if I were an object, God would not deign to laugh cheerfully again. Ah, I can hear the sound of the *koto*; just now I lost a tiny bit of morality.

## 63. The Horror of Suicide

Suicide itself is not frightening. The contemplation of suicide does not extend to the agony of dying; rather, when one's death is set in stone, one thinks of the *regret* that one has done something utterly irrevocable. At this moment, I am prepared to throw myself out the window of a high-rise building. I have written my will, and all my other preparations are complete. Very well then—I close my eyes . . . and jump! And so I jump. My feet part from the window, and my whole body is thrown into space.

But, in the very moment that I leap, a different thought abruptly flashes through my mind like a bolt of lightning. Suddenly, I clearly understood the meaning of life. Ah, what foolishness! I absolutely should *not* have chosen to die! The world is a cheerful place, and my prospects for the future practically sparkle. I absolutely do not want to die. I don't want to die, I don't want to die! But, I am already in the air, and my body shoots in



a straight line for the ground. Here, paving stones; there, white concrete. Ah, my skull smeared with blood! An inexorable conclusion!

. . . The terror of this hallucination never fails to make my face turn pale. There is absolutely nothing—*nothing!*—as horrifying as this kind of vision. Moreover, this is hardly a thought experiment that is inconceivable in reality. If those who died by their own hand could live once again and speak to us, no doubt they would relate such experiences. Now they are all spirits writhing with remorse in their graves. The very thought fills me with terror, so much so that I shudder even in my dreams.

#### **64. Suicide Methods**

There are two categories of suicide methods. The first is what we are all quite familiar with: drowning, poison, hanging, a bullet to the head, and so on. However, the second category of suicide encompasses methods in which one kills oneself gradually over a long period of time. For example, imbibing large amounts of alcohol while cognizant of the long-term risks to one's health; indulging in sex despite knowing beforehand the risk of contracting syphilis; abusing drugs like opium and morphine; in a word, any method in which one deliberately allows one's body to rot away. These methods of dying lack the heroism and tragic grandeur that characterize more stereotypical suicides. But, they are nevertheless equally serious methods: they are filled with that peculiarly modern pathos of deliberate maliciousness and cruelty to the self.

## **65. Suicide and Consciousness**

When a man resolves to kill himself, he has already inexorably set his course in motion from the *very first day* he conceived the idea. All human action is merely an unconscious reflex of the will: thus, a blasé regard for one's own well-being inevitably rises from somewhere deep in one's soul where the conception of self-destruction took root. The majority of pessimistic individuals, owing to the unnaturalness of their everyday lives, gradually go on ravaging their own bodies while oblivious to the purpose of their actions.

## **66. Suicide and Comedy**

All suicides are comic characters. Then again—what exactly is a comedy?

## **67. Suicide and Pessimism**

A man who possesses a sworn enemy does *not* want to die before his foe. In the same way, a man with a deep-rooted resentment towards human existence or the universe cannot let himself die until he satisfies his vendetta. Even if he is aware of the weakness of his will and the hopelessness of his situation, he does not desire his own destruction before that of his despicable adversaries (the lives of other human beings, nature, and so on). Suicide is surrender; it is to acknowledge the victory of all one's loathsome enemies.

Pessimists who endorse suicide will themselves never commit suicide.

## **68. We Must Avenge Our Suicides**

There is no such thing as "suicide." Unavoidable and cruel circumstances drive a man into a corner and force him to slit his throat. Thus, *all suicide is murder*. All suicides know their killers in a corner of their subconscious, and they bear an amorphous fury and grudge towards a foe that no one can see.

To pacify the souls of those who have killed themselves, we must seek out and interrogate the true criminals—be it the structure of society or the unjust rules of nature herself—and punish them with the full force of the law.

## **69. A Paradox of Buddhism**

The most beautiful suicide is not someone who tries to look impressive or to catch people's attention, nor is he full of despair or mentally deranged. Rather, the most beautiful suicide is someone in possession of a healthy and sound mind. He commits the act owing to inexorable fate: it is a death natural as it is sublime. It is what Shakyamuni preaches in Theravadic Buddhism. He praises the beautiful idea of Nirvana—a natural death in which one's consciousness is annihilated. Thus, Buddhist hymns possess the following subtle and profound paradoxes:

Shall we sing the praises of suicide, as human existence is evil?

Shall we condemn suicide, as it is merely another form of delusion?

The only beautiful death is Nirvana; a suicide that is not a suicide.

## 70. The Secret to Gambling

For the most part, it is coincidence or luck that decides victory in cards, horse racing, dice, and other kinds of gambling. However, technique is also relevant to a certain extent. For example, a card player can generally predict beforehand whether he will win the next round by carefully considering what his opponent's hand might be as well as the shuffling of the cards. If he has only a twenty-percent chance of winning, he will likely pass; if his chances of winning are decent, he will boldly play his hand. Betting on horse races or playing dice is no different. As one's skill increases, it becomes easier to calculate the chances of winning, and one becomes less likely to do anything foolish or reckless. This is what we might call "technique" in gambling. Thus, veteran gamblers are constantly trying to decrease the element of "chance" in gambling. They never experience enormous losses or enormous victories; rather, they consistently aim for somewhere between the two extremes. The purpose of gambling actually deviates from the daredevil spirit of adventure in which one prays for good luck or tries to draw a single lot out of a million. In principle, the spirit of gambling is not supposed to possess a logical mathematical structure to it that determines one's chances of victory or defeat. But, inveterate gamblers gradually memorize the rational mathematical principles that underlie games through repetitive experience and the consequent honing of technique. When they at last sense the contradiction here, they completely lose their interest in gambling. Those who make gambling their lives have the following to say about the "secret" to their trade: "The best trick to gambling is to not gamble in the first place."

## 71. The Essence of Tragedy

The essence of tragedy stems from man's frenzied obsession to unnaturally attain what is far beyond his reach. Examples: Nietzsche, who was so puffed up in his quest to surpass other human beings but ended up dying in a state of paranoia and madness; Tolstoy, who aspired to become a saint his whole life while constantly being plagued by tremendous lust; Qin Shi Huang, who dominated a whole age but nevertheless sought immortality; Lucifer and his defeated legion, smoldering in the depths of hell while planning their coup for all eternity; Napoleon, who dreamed of uniting the world before his annihilation; Caesar and his armies; Kondō Isami, who recklessly tried to protect with one sword a whole age from crumbling; Sanojirō Zaemon, who squandered all his wealth to win over a woman who would never love him in turn and wound up going on a killing spree out of pride; the list goes on and on. All of these men are tragic figures.

Thus, tragedy begins when men, failing to understand their own limitations and sinking into delusion, become intent on attaining what is beyond their reach. As some people have pointed out, Don Quixote is the archetype of tragedy—from this, we can say that all tragedy is also a form of comedy. Conversely, the essence of comedy inevitably possesses fundamental similarities to tragedy. Chaplin's genius and success as an actor derive from his deep insight into the true spirit of comedy.

## **72. The Philosophy of Wastefulness**

Charles Baudelaire squandered his inheritance within just two years of living an indulgent and immoderate life in Paris. Later, he wrote *The Flowers of Evil*, from which he did not even earn enough money to buy a pack of cigarettes. To put it another way, Baudelaire's wastefulness—exceeding the capabilities of any abacus—was a risky investment. He turned out to be a perspicacious investor: the fruit of his prodigal lifestyle—*The Flowers of Evil*—far exceeded the value and preciousness of his inheritance.

Thus, no investment or wastefulness is truly unnecessary. Everything which a man has invested will eventually come in use. Well then, I shall waste all my wealth! I shall gain nothing with my extravagance: neither valuable experiences nor even pleasure, it will be true wastefulness that leaves me waking up in the morning to my remorse alone. Nevertheless, this is a profitable investment, for this wretched experience will allow me to know the delusions of wealth and human existence, and thus I will no longer cling to the illusions of a futile happiness.

In life, everything one spends will be remunerated, even if our utilitarian abacuses seem to say otherwise. There is no such thing as true "wastefulness."

## **73. Imitation of Christ**

Some writers, convinced of their own worth, are incessantly thinking about how famous they will be after they die and how biographers and critics will discuss them.

They think that they will be treated like past luminaries and geniuses: every word they uttered in their lives and every line of their books will become material investigated by future chroniclers and critics. Thus, with the hope of impressing posterity, writers become extremely careful about everything they say, even refraining from sending a letter to a close friend if it lacks the proper literary touch. They are constantly trying to come up with "wise" sayings and proverbs, and they carefully structure their lives as if they have already hired a personal biographer who is observing every move they make. What a narrow-minded existence . . . I cannot even imagine the superhuman will they must possess.

I suppose it is quite extraordinary—worthy of respect, even. But in the end it is a foolish endeavor, an exercise in futility. What Jesus' disciples recorded was not the exact words of their master—rather, the disciples' words became sentences of exceptional beauty and power owing to their deep admiration of their master. For all we know, the words Jesus spoke may have been the ordinary and prosaic speech of everyday, discursive conversation. The wise words and sayings that writers attribute to our geniuses and great men were never uttered in reality. Unfinished writings or letters—the more careless the better—tear off a writer's mask and consequently draw the interest of critical biographers. Without these kinds of details, in fact, a biography would lose any significance it might hold for future generations and its subject would be buried by time. In the end, a man neither recalls nor records each and every thing—only that which is of interest to himself.

(*The Imitation of Christ* is a book published several years ago that sold tens and thousands of copies in America. Many readers exhorted others to precisely mimic the way of living portrayed in the book. When *The Imitation of Christ* became popular, caricatures of these "imitators" frequently appeared, thus warming the hearts of satirists everywhere).

#### **74. The Lunatic Who Watches The Clock**

In the room of a certain mental hospital, there is a man who, perched all day on his chair and with nothing to do, unremittingly glares at the second-hand of the clock. Surely there is no one in the entire world who is as bored or who has so much time on his hands—or so I thought. In fact, it was the opposite case, as the director of the hospital explained to me: "This unhappy fellow regards every moment of life as ceaseless activity. Thus, he gazes intently at the clock day after day lest he waste a single precious moment of life. Go on, try saying something to him. He will shout at you in irritation: 'Shut up! Just now, another precious second has passed. Time is life! Time is life!'"

#### **75. Life's Extravagance**

One German writer said that poets create their darkest and most depressing elegies when the weather is at its finest and they are in the best of moods. The mood of an elegy stems from the sweet intoxication of a single moment; it differs from actual sadness or depression. In fact, it is impossible for someone to create such a poem on a cloudy day,



or when he is so overwhelmed by despair that he has lost the will to live. "Extravagance," Nietzsche says, "is like bubbles that endlessly float up into the firmament." A poem is also a kind of extravagance: it floats up like a bubble regardless of what pit of despair one might be rotting in.

Nor is this extravagance limited to poetry—those who kill themselves are the same. On a joyous and sunny day, people happily hurl themselves into the crater of a volcano. If it happens to be a day when you see a blue flag gently fluttering above the weather station, be on guard. Suicides do not occur on gloomy days—for suicide itself is simply another form of extravagance.

## **76. The Rich Man and the Prodigal Son**

If a father works hard for his income and is a master in the art of making money, his son will accordingly specialize in the art of wasting it—a veritable genius of wastefulness. Truth be told, wasting money is actually far more difficult than making money. As long as one possesses a modicum of talent, it is fairly easy to generate a certain amount of wealth through a combination of persistent self-denial and diligence (Just consider how the world's rich seemingly overflow with doltish, hog-like vitality). In contrast, to squander a fortune one must possess the kind of fertile imagination that allows one to unearth various forms of stimulation in the tireless quest for novel pleasures. Thus, such a person possesses both an exquisite taste that scales the peaks of extravagance as well as the most delicate and creative sensitivity.

In general, the majority of money-earners are a horde of philistines, while their opposites—the profligates—are geniuses. Consequently, if the son of a rich man fails to produce a profligate son of his own, the heavens have been doubly unfair to him.

## **77. Fantasists**

When people imagine Martians, what they come up with is a hackneyed conglomeration of whatever life forms and other substances they themselves have witnessed on earth. In the same way, whatever landscapes they envisage all stem from a hodgepodge of their own surroundings, travels, and experiences; it is impossible for them to come up with a single thing that is truly novel. All imagination is banal, and all fantasies are impoverished. Even dreams are limited to being mere replications of one's past experiences: has anyone ever had a dream in which wings naturally sprouted from his body, for example?

"Fantasists" are chronic insomniacs: yawning at life's tediousness, they end up repeating *ad nauseum* the same topics and assembling them into complex mosaics within their heads. There is nothing so empty and mundane as the world in which a fantasist resides!

## **78. The Pathos of Kant**

Kant was a quintessential professor. Forced to live his life methodically and according to fixed boundaries, he bore alone on his shoulders the pathos of the everyday

man. Kant: he epitomizes the sadness of the kind of average man—the solitary, lonely human being—who, wrapped in the overcoat of skepticism, frequently appears in *fin de siècle* novels. Poets alone are capable of intuiting the deep significance underlying his categorical imperatives.

### **79. The Dragon**

The dragon symbolizes a monarch's desires. As it rides atop the august clouds of authority and ceaselessly fumes with fury, it bares its fangs within perpetual strife.

### **80. The Rest of One's Life**

What is the "rest of one's life"? It refers to the duration of life in which one writes annotations about one's past employment. Even during the "rest of one's life" one is saddled with work!

### **81. The Advantage of Business**

The advantage of business is that it forces people to get everything they can out of their precious free time. In contrast, those at leisure are not acquainted with life's tenser moments. Thus, they are incapable of feeling the same level of fulfillment in their pleasures or hobbies.

## **82. Friendship and Silence**

The implicit agreement in friendship is to turn a blind eye to the other person's flaws and to not speak ill of him, whether in his presence or behind his back. The most difficult task in mastering the art of friendship is learning how to endure this silence. Consequently, people of nervous disposition or those who lack this kind of mental training are incapable of holding many friendships. A person who seems to be constantly surrounded by friends is generally strong-willed and possesses significant mental training in this regard. He appears to earn people's respect and even adoration on account of so many friendships. However, this same man has scribbled in his notebook all manner of criticism and fury towards his many friends that he has kept secret. What is impressive about this is that he will take this history of silent endurance with him to the grave. Thus, when one stands before the grave of a departed friend, one doffs one's hat in respect and becomes prey to deep emotion.

## **83. On Reading *The Count of Monte Cristo***

Ah, youth! Imagine a man forced to spend his irrecoverable youth in solitude confined in the darkness of a prison, knowing neither women nor love and cut off from every single pleasure life has to offer. His youth, during which he could have availed himself of every manner of splendid romance, was instead consumed day after day in a terrifyingly monotonous daily grind within a basement's thick walls. When the man finally left prison, so much time had passed that his hair was already flecked with gray.

Even the vast hoard of treasures he later found did not allow him to recover his lost youth, and he consequently gave up on life's pleasures. No hope of turning back the wheels of time! And so, the sole task left to this unhappy man was to use his riches to take revenge on all the causes of his misery: human beings, society, the law, fate, nature, and the universe itself.

In *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Dumas transforms this fairly unremarkable human tragedy into the epic form of a drama. What attracts the general reader, however, is not the novel's elaborate and large-scale structure; rather, it provokes a universally-felt sadness that is all too common in real life. To borrow Hamlet's words, the world is an immense prison filled with an infinite variety of miseries. The majority of people forfeit life's most spectacular period and end up spending it in futile monotony for diverse reasons: money, work, an unimpressive personal appearance, shyness, sickness, a cruel and harsh upbringing—the list goes on. Who can really reflect on his life and boast that he was able to live outside the confines of his individual prison? In the end, every human life, along with art, is a form of revenge.

("The artistic spirit is vengeance."—Benjamin De Casseres)

#### **84. Forgetfulness in the City**

The joy of the city is the possibility of *forgetfulness* wherever you may be. Joyful forgetfulness—the kind that allows you to blank out the oppressiveness of daily life, whether it is the difficulties of family life or inconsolable tedium—exists everywhere in

the city: the theater and the movies; strolling through crowds and observing beautiful women walk past; window-shopping at department stores; or even just boarding a train to watch the city's crowds from the window or to observe the other passengers. In contrast, life in the countryside offers no such opportunities to forget. One unrelentingly clashes with the suffocating walls of tedium and the difficulties of everyday life without hope of relief. Surely this is one of life's most painful and terrifying predicaments.

### **85. In The Crowd**

"The crowd is the solitary's home."—Baudelaire

The freedom of life in the city lies in the possibility of joining cheerful crowds without having to deal with the annoyance of human interaction.

Around noon, I was seated at a restaurant in the city. It was lively and bustling with customers, and every table was taken. A young couple, a group of students, a mother with her children—they all sat at their respective tables while talking about their families and everyday lives. Although each group was surrounded by other people, each conversation remained unique and shut off from the others. Those facing each other at their tables were so immersed in their private discussions that they hardly paid attention to their neighbors.

This cityscape never fails to warm my heart. All of these people come together to form a crowd while nevertheless keeping a respectful distance from the lives of others. What a vista of detachment, of blitheness, and of joyful forgetfulness!

At twilight, I was sitting on a park bench. Young couples, linked arm in arm and chatting happily, passed in front of me. Each couple would study the others and offer some comment or criticism. All the while, it was as if the mirthful music of love were echoing through the skies to accompany them.

One couple casually strolled over and sat on the bench next to mine. With shy smiles on their faces, they whispered happily and excitedly to each other. After some time passed they stood up and went off somewhere, hand in hand. The whole time they had not looked at me; in fact, it seemed like they had not even registered my existence.

Life in the city is life lived in a crowd: completely unique individuals pondering their own private thoughts sit side by side on park benches without bothering each other as they all gaze at the same sky. The sky spreads out over the homeless, the unemployed, and all the other human beings wandering aimlessly around Asakusa Park. When the street lamps light up at night, the sky seems to evoke an infinitely lonely panorama.

No doubt, the freedom of city life is the freedom to be in a crowd. The crowd consists entirely of individuals yet also possesses a collective will. No one interferes in my life or obstructs my freedom. Within this collective will, I enjoy myself alongside the others while thinking, doing, and experiencing my own life. To those sick at heart or those weighed down by anxiety or those suffering from loneliness—or, especially, to those who *treasure* their loneliness—the crowd is truly the heart's home, a place for intimacy and solace. Along with Baudelaire, I shall sing my own lonely song.

The city is my lover; the crowd is my home. Ah, as I wander beneath the city sky, I shall walk on and on with this crowd; I shall drift with it until it disappears in the far-off horizon over the waves.

## **86. Revenge on Despair**

Writers with political sympathies are far happier than so-called "pure" writers who lack them. With respect to the former, the "enemy" that they loathe—the root of the evil that makes life miserable—possesses a clear identity. Moreover, they continually maintain their hopes with the belief that their revenge—a revolution—will someday be realized. In contrast, what troubles "artistic" writers—people like Baudelaire, Nietzsche, and Dostoyevsky—does not lie solely in the structure of society (politics, the law, etc.). What troubles them is something far more profound and ominous that lies at the heart of human existence: man's bestial instincts in the natural world and the unease underlying lust and other attachments to existence. Their themes frequently transcend the mere world of phenomena to tackle the fundamental problems of metaphysics. *This* is the enemy against which these writers swear vengeance, for it torments them ceaselessly throughout their lives. Since the identity of this enemy is amorphous, there will be no possibility or hope of vanquishing it for all eternity. All lives that dwell in the immutable world of literature inevitably exist alongside the infinite sadness that comes with trying to take revenge against one's despair.

## **87. Schopenhauer and Buddha**

Many believe that Schopenhauer's philosophy is a reworking of Theravada Buddhism. Nevertheless, I have my doubts as to how similar these two contrastive



figures—Buddha and Schopenhauer—really are. Just where, in the latter, do we sense the secluded charm of a Buddhist temple and the scent of faintly burning agar? Or Nirvana, which forms the core of Theravadic thought: where in Schopenhauer do we hear the hushed temple bells, which encourage us to overcome ignorance and worldly attachment to attain the joyful death of Nirvana—that quiet, untroubled sleep? That owlish philosopher was filled with a quite un-Buddhist-like hatred and agitation as he hurled his baleful maledictions against human existence:

"What is life? An interminable inferno of suffering. No matter how you try to live, you will end up suffering. But don't worry—there's nothing wrong in killing yourselves off as soon as possible. Get it? Heh heh heh—it's nothing less than what you all deserve!"

These are the sentiments underlying the entirety of Schopenhauer's philosophy. He would squint down on all the suffering human beings from a window in his room—and then he would go on playing his flute with malicious joy.

Schopenhauer is no Buddha. His philosophy, a disguised bomb of demonic proportions, is a kind of revenge against the whole phenomenal universe.

(It is said that the philosophy underlying the nihilists in nineteenth-century Russia has its roots in Schopenhauer. These men were anarchists of a sort; along with literature, they conceived of their own "revenge on despair").

## 88. The Philosophy of Divination

A fortuneteller, rapping his mysterious bamboo stick, might say something like the following in a portentous tone: "A man's life—from birth to death—is ordained by the stars in the heavens. Thus, I can read the book that is your life—from the first page to the last—precisely and without error by consulting my astrological tomes."

This way of thinking aligns fortunetelling with philosophical determinism: in other words, in the same way as science or materialism, it seeks to explain all phenomena as occurring through cause and effect, thus positing that we live in a noncontingent universe and that all human life is preordained according to mathematical principles. But, if this is true, no one would bother to consult fortunetellers in the first place. As the fortunetellers claim, the course of a human life—past, present, and future—is preordained and inexorable. Suppose you scatter some poor melon seeds in the shade: eventually, there will be a poor seedling, which will inevitably engender a poor melon. Similarly, the way a human life unfolds and its ultimate outcome stem from its beginnings. Just as a melon's most ardent prayers will never allow it to become some other kind of fruit, the course of a human life written in the great tome of astrology is impervious to change or erasure.

Thus, why is it that foretellers seem to freely alter a person's fate and hint at a happy future? Regardless of whether you consult a fortuneteller or not, the unhappiness prescribed for you in your future is unavoidable. Thus, it seems human beings must do their utmost to shut their eyes to fate and to will self-ignorance. A criminal condemned to death, no matter how curious he may be, will surely not go out of his way to ask his jailor

the date of his execution. Human beings are able to go on living precisely because they *cannot* predict the future: would you want to go consult a fortuneteller only to be told that you will someday commit suicide? When they go to the fortunetellers' stalls, what people are looking for is the hope that they will experience some vague happiness—that fate *might* have something kind in store for them. Ironically, those who consult fortunetellers in the first place are often people who have experienced misfortune in the past or are going through difficult circumstances at present, and thus they unlikely have a bright future in store.

Those who divine people's destinies—whether by reading their physiognomies or tracing the lines of their palms or through other methods—abjure their deterministic view of human life in order to redeem the lives of such people. Now they argue the opposite: one's free will can overcome and even manipulate one's fate, and one can consciously change a foreboding palm reading into an auspicious one through self-awareness and effort. They calmly claim this despite the obvious contradictions: "The course of fate is indeed determined along with the movement of the stars. However, human beings, by becoming aware of what awaits them, can avert impending disasters: they can prudently prepare for the future by turning calamities into small mishaps and by seizing good opportunities." Thereupon they will recommend the best course of action to carve out one's future: "When you next travel, make sure to head southeast. Good fortune awaits you there: you will acquire a hoard of riches in one stroke. Your past unhappiness stems from the curse of a tree (south of you) that is bent towards the northeast. Cut this tree down, and your future will undoubtedly change for the better." On and on they go. Is there anything as replete with self-serving sophistry as divination?

### **89. If Jesus Were Alive**

If Jesus were alive today, he would likely voice displeasure at all the different denominations of Christianity: "This is not what I taught!" Thereupon these sects would all condemn Jesus as heretical and burn him at the stake. Those who carry on the teachings of a religion worship their founder only as an icon; otherwise, they do not permit his existence. A "living" founder would be regarded as a hindrance wherever he went.

### **90. Lust Is Long; Life Is Short**

Lust is long; life is short.

The implications here are rich—what other line is there that could potentially fuel such a seductive and enjoyable conversation? Schiller's words were never uttered in such earnest.

("Love is short; regrets are long."—Friedrich Schiller)

### **91. Interactions In Old Age**

A kind of physiological cruelty underlies the interactions of old people. The observer feels a mixture of both hostility and pity as he sees them maliciously peering at

each other as they attempt to pry out each other's health. The elderly always give precedence to their health when they speak: "My strength seems to be going with the years; this cold weather is really taking its toll!" "Oh yes, same here." This is the way they talk. Consequently they feel both pity and contempt for each other. When one of their old friends dies, the living feel a curiously cruel sense of victory. "Hmph, so he has finally met his maker!" they remark sarcastically.

## **92. Bridges**

All bridges hold a single architectural design: the passion to suspend time over space and to realize a certain kind of fantastical idea.

Bridges are the mathematics of dreams.

## **93. Doors**

A door serves as a division between two different spaces.

Children are inside, and fate awaits them outside. Maeterlinck treats this theme in *The Death Of Tintagiles*. What I want to add is this: there are lamps lit inside, while outside one can hear the roaring of laughter. When the wind blows away the laughter with a sad whoosh, the laughter in turn smothers the lamplight.

#### **94. The Philosophy of Soldiers**

The bayonet is the modern soldier's final resort on the battlefield—a return to the simple spear of ancient times. Thus, civilization demonstrates the wretchedness of evolution; once humanity reaches a certain stage, all it can do is revert to its barbaric instincts.

#### **95. On German Miserliness**

The value of something corresponds to the amount of pleasure it gives you and to what extent it satisfies what you desire. However, since "pleasure" is subjective, it does not possess a fixed value that can be applied universally to all individuals. For example, the satisfaction a glass of water will give is priceless to the man dying of thirst, but worth practically nothing to someone else.

Consequently the Germans, infamous for their subjective way of looking at things, are infamous for making complaints like this: "I can't believe I had to pay five dollars for this lousy beer! How the hell am I supposed to get drunk off this?" To which the bartender replies, "It's your own fault that you're not getting drunk! I'm selling beer of the highest quality."

"Nonsense! Why, this morning I exercised for three hours to make myself thirsty enough to relish this beer. Thus, logically speaking, it is utterly preposterous that I am not getting drunk. In light of this beer's true value under the law, I refuse to pay anything more than *three* dollars for it."

This same dialogue repeats itself *ad nauseum* all over Germany: in the cafes, in the marketplaces, in restaurants, and even in the brothels. Thus, Germans are infamous worldwide for their miserliness.

Generally, a miser is someone who prefers to obsess over the subjective value of something rather than look objectively at the item in question. A miser basically refers to a logical romanticist who worships subjectivity. Thus, the German romanticists are emblematic of their nation's miserliness.

## **96. A Poet's Death is Sad**

One day Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, mired in the depths of irremediable despair, spoke to me of the darkness of death and the meaninglessness of existence. No, he did not speak to me; he was *pleading* with me.

"But, you have created immortal works for future generations and earned such fame," I said offhand, thinking to console him. Instead, my words seemed to touch a nerve in the unhappy man, driving him to rage. Although normally timid, shy, and apt to stoically mask his emotions, this time, turning pale, he said fiercely:

"My *works*? My *fame*? What the hell is any of it worth?"

Nietzsche, in his final, lonely years when he lived under the care of his sister in a German psychiatric clinic, one day casually looked up at the sky and, as if stumbling upon something in the midst of his lunacy, said, "Why, I believe that I wrote some fairly good books long ago!"

What sad, stinging words to come from the arrogant man who proclaimed that he was the greatest genius yet since the dawn of human civilization. The words his tear-stained sister used to console her brother were likely similar to the ones I spoke to my friend who committed suicide. Similarly, Nietzsche's response was likely just as filled with a sense of futility and sadness:

"What the hell is any of it worth? What the hell is any of it worth?"

However, there are also men in the world who possess a different temperament. After Admiral Nelson was fatally wounded at the Battle of Trafalgar, the words that he spoke on his deathbed while surrounded by his loyal subordinates are famous: "I have fulfilled my duty to my country." People like Bismarck, Hindenburg, Itō Hirobumi, and Admiral Tōgō probably thought similarly on their deathbeds as they calmly reflected on the past: "I have done everything I am supposed to have done." Then, smiling calmly, they likely died at peace with themselves.

There is a saying that "A bird's death is sad, and a man's death is pleasant." However, in our part of the world, we add a twist to this saying to make it sharper and more anguished:

"A man's death is pleasant, and a poet's death is sad!"

## **97. Lord, Grant Me Rest!**

As Confucius wandered through the wilderness in China, one day he stood by the river and said:

"Do you always flow like this, regardless of day and night?"



The unhappiness of flowing water is that it is never permitted rest. At night, all creation is silent: when people, birds, trees, grass, and all other living things are in a deep slumber, only the water is still awake as it continues to flow. The water continues its journey in the midst of a soundless, pitch-dark, lonely world as it passes through mountains, valleys, and an infinite number of bleak wilderness landscapes. Ah, who can understand the pathos of the water? Only the man still awake at night next to his pillow as he listens to the rippling of the water. How weary my soul is. Lord, grant me rest!

## **98. Father and Child**

In my dream, I heard the pathetic sobbing of my child:

"Everyone bullies me . . . they all say I'm an idiot."

The child was, in fact, quite simpleminded. She also had no mother.

"No more crying! You aren't an idiot; you're just an unhappy, pitiable child cursed by fate."

"Daddy, what does it mean to be 'cursed by fate'?"

"It means one's past errors."

"'Errors'?"

"An error is everything a human being does without thinking: for example, being born; living; eating; getting married; reproducing—these are all errors!"

"Are they no longer errors if you think before doing them?"

"Well . . . even if you thought it out beforehand, I suppose they're still errors."

"But, what should we do then?"

"The hell if I know. Why don't you try asking Jesus?"

The child started going to Sunday school and learned the hymns by heart.

"Hey Daddy, there goes a cart!"

Far off in the horizon, mountain peaks rose like cresting waves. In the distance, a man was forlornly tugging along his cart as he traversed the slopes. My child ran after him, jumped onto the cart, and disappeared with the driver as they faded into the horizon.

"W-wait! Where are you going? Hey, where are you going!?" I shouted at the top of my lungs. But the child, not even looking back at me as she chattered with the cart's driver, went further and further into the distance as if setting out on a pilgrimage.

"My tooth hurts! It hurts!"

When I woke from my dream, my child was sobbing quite convincingly in the little bed next to mine.

"My tooth hurts! It hurts, it hurts! My savior Jesus Christ, branded a criminal and strung up on the cross . . . My tooth hurts, it hurts!"

## **99. The River Lethe**

Before coming into this world, a human being must first traverse Lethe, the river of forgetfulness, and this is why no one retains any memories from a previous existence. Or so Plato's philosophy claims. But, one wonders curiously—what if you end up *not* crossing it? I admit that my own curiosity is inspired by Nietzsche's interest in the matter (according to his idea of eternal recurrence, what is happening now has already occurred in the past, and it will be repeated again in the future—perpetually). If one fails to cross

Lethe, one's unimpaired memories would likely result in a man becoming depressed and eventually dying of boredom. There would be no sense of adventure nor any hope for the future in such an existence, for the person in question would already be hyper-aware of what would happen to him tomorrow and thereafter.

Plato's philosophy—what romanticism and poetic fantasy! It never fails to stir my sense of nostalgia. Nietzsche reinterpreted his idea of Lethe in a way that is so malicious, nihilistic, and modern.

### **100. The Prattle of the Successful**

Surely there is nothing so inconsistent and haphazard as the different methods the elderly recommend to maintain one's health. One advocates moderate desires, another an adaptable attitude towards nature's course; one recommends an active life, another a quiet and idle life; one counsels abstinence from alcohol, while another sings the praises of the Epicurean life. Basically, those who have lived a long life recommend only the methods that seem to work with their unique body types. In reality, they have effortlessly lived to their respective ages only owing to whatever genes they possess that guarantee a longer lifespan. Thus, there is only one "secret" to longevity: "Thou must live as thy will directs in accordance with thy nature."

The prattle of the so-called "successful" is no different. To hear a billionaire speak smugly about how he became so successful is an expedient aid to understanding the ludicrousness and meaningless delusion that underlies human existence. Successful people, in addition to their hereditary advantages, possess the particular willpower and

abilities that are useful in society; and as they acted in society, they did no more than grasp whatever opportunities happened to present themselves. If someone were born in eighteenth-century France with the same ambition and genius of Napoleon along with a sharp intellect and indomitable will, he would inevitably have become just as significant a figure. Similarly, it is natural that a weak man like Francois Villon became an unhappy outcast and a thief owing to his specific circumstances and the society he lived in.

There are no revelations or lessons to be learned from a discourse concerning "How I succeeded." The answer is predictably quite banal: "I vigorously obeyed the dictates of my will and naturally did what I wanted to." A certain young man, after reading a book of success stories, sighed and made the following observation: "Just as the successful in this book would have been successful no matter what situation they happened to be in, most failures will end up failing regardless of circumstance. I have not read any other book about the truth of human existence that has so moved me."

### **101. Life's Immutable Laws**

Mozart, despite the brevity of his life, fulfilled his spectacular role as a brilliant musician before passing away. Rimbaud, still practically a child when he shocked the world with his single volume of poetry, consequently disappeared from the world of literature like a comet. As a human being, Rimbaud lived longer; but as a poet, his lifespan was even briefer than that of Keats or Shelley—like the transient flare of fireworks. In the opposite camp is someone like Goethe, who continued to write into his old age. Goethe's lifespan as a writer was not only long: the greatness and perfection of

his works were possible precisely because of his longevity. Being who he was, Goethe *had* to live into old age.

When Herbert Spencer conceived of *First Principles*—a massive philosophical encyclopedia that is like a symphony of mankind's knowledge—he was already in his forties. Because he was plagued by physical maladies, he could barely summon the energy to endure one hour of work on any given day. The work he envisioned, however, required at minimum ten hours of work per day—and even then it would take decades to complete. Overwhelmed and driven to despair by these frightening calculations, he considered giving up. Nevertheless, Spencer pulled through. After he finished the great work that secured him eternal fame, he was finally able to smile before his death.

As the above examples demonstrate, a man accomplishes in his particular lifespan whatever it is he is supposed to accomplish. Although he may not live even one more day after he has accomplished his fated task, neither will he die before it is completed. Even in cases that do not seem to fall under the category of "natural death" (dying of sickness in old age after living a relatively long time), this law of fatality holds true. People frequently voice "What if . . .?" questions when a talented person meets an unexpected death or when someone with good prospects for the future ends up committing suicide: "Just what if he had gone on to live a few more years?" However, all such speculation is futile. Even if some people seem to die prematurely, they themselves were well aware that it was time to die; and had they lived longer, it is unlikely they would have been able to add to their past accomplishments. Fate teaches a man how to die a proper death at the proper time—and he will not finish his lifespan before or beyond what fate decrees.

## **Chapter 3: History – Society – Civilization**

### **102. The Victory of the Military**

In the army, everyone wears identical clothes and performs identical tasks. At the same time, even the subtlest differences in rank—whether between soldiers and officers or captains and lieutenants—are strictly observed.

Thus, the army has assimilated two contradictory ways of thinking. Although all soldiers are equal, there is also rank: democracy and authoritarianism exist side by side. This way of thinking that is peculiar to the military has become the dominant strand of thought in Europe—whether Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, or Soviet Russia. Militarism truly seems to be dominating the planet.

### **103. Japan's Success**

The Japanese learned medicine and military science from Germany. However, they failed to absorb the idealism and romanticism that underlie German culture.

The Japanese learned law and statesmanship from France. However, they did not import France's predilection for elegance or its Catholicism.

The Japanese imitated both England's navy and its commerce. However, they ignored the common sense and chivalry that characterize the English character.

Long ago, the Japanese studied China's culture and literature. However, they did not assimilate the anarchic individualism and naturalism underlying Chinese philosophy.

In general, the Japanese primarily took the West's applied sciences, and we can see this in our land's system of railroads and telegrams. At the same time, they did not import the spirit of Hellenism or Christianity that are the foundations of Western culture.

In the same way, Japan's writers and artists appreciated the aroma of foreign exoticism and stylishness of Western literature while failing to understand its *spirit*.

As the above demonstrates, Japan has learned much from other countries. It did not study these foreign countries for the purpose of truly understanding them; rather, it imported only what was useful and applicable to improving everyday life. Now Japan has crushed China, surpassed the West, and has evolved at last into a first-world nation. But it is a success that is far too practical and utilitarian.

#### **104. The Absurdity of Democracy**

The unfair congenital characteristics that decisively determine whether a human being is happy or unhappy: for example, whether one is intelligent or stupid by nature; whether one will have a healthy body or be prone to sickness; whether a woman turns out to be a beauty or a hag; whether one possesses a firm will or a feeble one; whether one is pessimistic or optimistic; whether one is virtuous or bereft of virtues; whether one has a personality that attracts people or one that repels them—what if, obeying the injunction of democracy to create a life that makes happiness available to all without partiality, we eliminated these inequalities, replacing them only with the variations in lifestyle that *follow* birth (differences in wealth, status, and so on)? The analogy would be the attempt to create a "fair" game of cards or mahjong by reducing the luck involved in the initial

distribution of the cards through "logical" rules that remove all traces of fortune. The fundamental inequality exists within the cards that are *initially* distributed, and this initial hand determines the outcome of the game. However, people never question the *reason behind* this inequality. For to do so would be to gainsay the fundamental principles underlying the game; it is commensurate with the annihilation of human existence.

### **105. The Delusions of Nationalism**

Confucianism exhorted the Chinese people to demonstrate the same absolute obedience that slaves have towards their masters. Initially, China's political system was a dog-eat-dog world in which strength determined supremacy. Consequently, the common people served their masters only out of self-interest. For China's statesmen, the people's strict observance of morals was imperative. When Mencius says, "If a ruler fails to rule, the subject need not serve," he is simply admonishing despotism, not instigating the common people to revolt. The kind of filial piety and courteousness that Confucianism in China advocated was nothing but the enforcement of slave morality, and it differs in essence from the relationship of lord and retainer that was dominant in Japan's Warring States Period. When Mencius's works reached Japan during the Edo period, Japan's Confucianists supposedly tossed his works into the sea, declaring even Mencius heretical and boasting that Japan's code of morality had surpassed China's. When the Japanese realized that they had perfected Confucian slave-morality, it not only filled them with pride but even with *national* self-respect because they had outstripped China. This is precisely like the elation and national pride the Japanese feel today when they boast of



perfecting their trains, ships, buildings, medical science, and all of their other Western imports.

#### **106. The Disgrace of Bushidō**

When a particular class of society is supposed to possess a certain *spirit*, they tend to identify the purest form of that spirit as having existed in a bygone golden age. For example, *bushidō* in Japan existed in its purest form only during the Warring States period. During the peaceful years of the Tokugawa period, the spirit of *bushidō* started to decline. Political administrators at the time took advantage of this and molded *bushidō* into a new form. For example, the foundation of *bushidō* was a respect for the freedom and dignity of one's individual character, and this is why a samurai could not endure any form of contempt. This respect for character was also integral to the relationship between lord and retainer (the foreigner who wrote *History of the Church of Japan* commented from an objective standpoint that the Japanese were quite exceptional among Eastern races, for in other East Asian countries where slave-morality was dominant, lord-retainer relationships did not possess this leeway). The Tokugawa shogunate, however, subverted the true spirit of *bushidō*—along with its esteem for one's individual freedom—into its opposite. This marks the profanation of *bushidō*. And it is this same profaned spirit that some of today's politicians and ultranationalists are advocating under the name of *bushidō*.

### **107. Akechi Mitsuhide**

In Japan's history of *bushidō*, Akechi Mitsuhide stands out as the archetype of the too-honest man. I suppose not just him—his whole family was the same. His daughter, Hosokawa Garasha, was the archetype of a virtuous Japanese woman. His cousin, Samanosuke, demonstrated both bravery and a sense of justice from a young age. When Mitsuhide's mother became a hostage, she preferred to die heroically rather than betray her son's trust. His wife was also a faithful and virtuous woman who reflected the spirit of *bushidō*. Mitsuhide learned from his mother that a warrior must serve his lord with all his heart; that he must value the individual spirit of both himself and others; that he must never permit the contempt of another; that he must value loyalty and despise cowardice and deception; and so on. However, when Mitsuhide's lord betrayed his trust and humiliated him, the fact that Mitsuhide needed to "faithfully serve" the same master provoked a crisis in conscience. It was the torment of being forced with two paths that stretched inexorably before him: whether to relinquish his personal code of *bushidō* or to retaliate against his master's tyranny. Mitsuhide was too honorable. Consequently he suffered defeat, and went on to live in infamy as a "traitor." Men who are too honorable—how tragic they are all!

### **108. Justice Is Invariably Antiquated**

Socialism is an outgrowth of capitalism, according to Marx, and this fate is as inevitable as the process of a fruit maturing and eventually falling to the ground. Thus,

those who possess a strong sympathy for socialism are born into a society in which capitalism has reached its full maturity. It is precisely those born into such a system and familiar with the bourgeoisie—for example, Henry Ford—who inevitably become the age's "progressive" capitalists. However, the birth of socialism did not occur in America or in Ford's factories; its genesis was in immature European countries like Germany and Russia in which countless feudal traditions and customs remain unchanged. Those who rallied under the socialist banner—Marx and Lenin, for example—were patriotic and spirited men of the Enlightenment; in other words, the intelligentsia. They were people who were *not* able to adapt to the society and the cultural milieu of capitalism. It was precisely this environment that they strenuously objected to. Despite being children of the age of the capitalism, they not only were incapable of assimilating capitalism but even failed to pass through the stage of capitalism altogether.

Thus, the truth is that socialism is neither an outgrowth of capitalism nor some kind of inevitable societal transition, but a kind of hostile backlash. It is a step in the cultural war of a different group of men who, incapable of adapting to the civilization of the previous generation, willfully seek out a new one. This marks the birth of an entirely new race of men—they have no predecessors among the previous generation—and thus socialism is the *replacement* of political power that comes about through revolution and rapine.

We can observe the same tendencies in the literary establishment. For example, the naturalist movement of literature was neither the outgrowth nor natural evolution of romanticism. Rather, it was a violent reaction—a literary revolution—*against* romanticism. Those who stood at the forefront of this revolution—Zola, Turgenev,

Yamada Katai, Tokuda Shūsei—failed to "graduate" from romanticism, and they were incapable of assimilating the literature of the previous generation. In the previous age, these men were isolated from the literary establishment—and they could not endure this cultural obscurity. Thus, they achieved their revenge by propounding a new kind of literature (all revolutions fall under the category of revenge).

In Ancient Greece, the Sophists came to dominate ancient Greek thought, and they were the most avant-garde thinkers of their time. Just think about how reactionary and antiquated the philosophy of Socrates was in comparison, and how he fought with them—and won! It was not as if he entirely failed to comprehend the thinking of his opponents. Rather, what he did not understand was the nihilism of the age with all its uneasy banter: the clamor of joy that accompanied the conversion of knowledge into money, the clever arguments that delighted in the paradox, and the nihilistic pleasure of treating "truth" with contempt. He loathed the age which failed to apprehend his antiquated purity and earnestness. No different was Jesus Christ's struggle with the Sadducees and Pharisees (the latter in fact were the so-called "moderns" and avant-garde of the age who steadily kept pace with the swift cultural currents).

In conclusion, all revolutionaries and idealists are those who fail to adapt to the times and end up repudiating the thinking of the previous generation along with their contemporaries. Consequently, all justice is antiquated, and idealists are unfailingly reactionary.

## 109. On Visiting Tōji-in

Since Takauji Ashikaga, the philosophy of the Ashikaga shogunate was consistent with the nihilism that stems from Laozi and Zhuangzi. They stood by twiddling their thumbs as the greedy helped themselves to whatever they wished, thus effectively decimating the value and credibility of their political authority. And yet, despite their apparent uselessness, the Ashikaga nevertheless seized political power and upheld it for the span of thirteen generations. Takauji was a philosopher. The shoguns who followed him were consistently poets, men of taste and refinement, and the intelligentsia of their respective ages. When it came to politics, they were admittedly utter incompetents. While meditating in the shade of tatami rooms, they would absorb themselves in the elegant pursuits of *nō* and calligraphy. A foreigner who saw *Kinkaku-ji* exclaimed: "All rulers live in palaces that radiate splendor and authority. Yet, this is the first time in my worldly peregrinations that I have seen a ruler's residence that emanates an *artistic spirit*." The lives of the Ashikaga shoguns are unparalleled with respect to the depth of their elegance and the profundity of their thought. And these sophisticates are still with us today: one can sense them as one breathes in the aroma of *matcha* in one of Tōji-in's low-ceilinged, shady, and quiet rooms. Until around 1910, the young priest and guide there would say to visitors, "Beginning with Takauji, all thirteen generations of the Ashikaga were generous men who were deeply devoted to the spirit of Buddhism. Once you have finished looking around the temple, please let me make some tea for you in the next room."

## 110. Ashikaga Takauji

Ashikaga Takauji was the Julian the Apostate of Japanese history. Takauji's tragedy is that, though born a consummate philosopher, he was mistakenly raised by a warrior family and compelled to spend his whole life on the battlefield. He studied Zen under Musō Soseki and absorbed his master's anarchic nihilism from a young age. Every time Takauji appeared on the battlefield, he would sigh and say, "I have no wish to take part in this insurrection. And yet others have impelled me to do so. The relentless tide of the age has forced the mantle of leadership on me. My life is an accident, and I have no will of my own. Very well then—I shall go along with my fate!" And every time Takauji fought, he would lose; and every time he lost, it would only renew his determination. Everything seemed inevitable to Takauji; his path of carnage was his inexorable fate.

With such an attitude, Takauji hardly understood the concept of having "enemies." His "enemies" were an unfortunate group of victims who, just like himself, had been impelled by ruthless fate to fight. Thus, Takauji always treated his adversaries with magnanimity, nor did he reveal the slightest trace of animosity. Regardless of any deep-rooted grudge an enemy might hold against him, Takauji would always accept surrender and treat his erstwhile foes hospitably, showing them the same faith as he would a close ally. When his final adversary, Kusunoki Masashige, died in battle, Takauji lamented, "This is not the outcome I wished for!" He later carefully washed Kusunoki's head and respectfully dressed the corpse before sending the remains to his bereaved family.

Takauji loved peace, but his whole life was consumed by interminable fighting. Even when he defeated the enemy in front of him, he also had to fight endlessly with both his retainers and even his blood relatives, who, despite being the people he trusted the most, were always mutinying against him and plotting his death. Throughout his life Takauji was backstabbed again and again by others. He trusted so many people, only to become disillusioned with them. While his view of life was optimistic, he was, at the same time, a pessimist. He was an ambitious man who adored peace; he was both murderer and humanitarian; he was both a hero and a man of deep piety. Takauji was plagued by contradictions. He accepted these contradictions—even affirmed the meaning of his existence in the midst of them—and went on fighting his tragic war to the end. Just like Alexander the Great and Aristotle, Takauji took the philosophy of his teacher to heart and attempted to self-consciously connect it with his life on the battlefield. Thus Musō Soseki, while showing respect to his powerful pupil, nevertheless would often sigh unhappily and criticize Takauji. While sometimes it seemed superficially that Soseki was praising his student, deep inside he would be thinking, "Look at this man, who stands blood-drenched in the battlefield, covered with terrible scars—a man doomed to not have a sound sleep until the day he dies! He is my beloved pupil, and yet he is a Buddhist heretic. Oh, look at this pitiful, tragic man!"

### **111. History's Lament**

"Life is so short, but its annotations so long!" So History said with a sigh.

## 112. The Mysteries Of Warfare

Ancient Egypt's army would array itself into a closely-packed square formation of ten-thousand men, with each row consisting of one-hundred soldiers. This veritable fortress of human beings would move like some gigantic elephant, trampling its foes wherever it went. The Egyptians were probably flatfooted and generally did not possess much physical strength, so they were not suited to one-on-one combat. Thus, the Egyptians would assemble their soldiers in groups to create a strong and flexible army, and this force was like a tenacious octopus. In contrast, the soldiers of braver nations would stand alone on the front lines, skirmishing one-on-one with their foes. Assyrian soldiers looked like tiny but tough rhinoceros beetles. No matter what army they were up against, they would leap at their foes, darting around like dragon flies. The Persians, on the other hand, making an enormous racket with the clashing of their shields, would deploy scythed chariots into the enemy's midst. The scythe attached to the wheels would slash through their enemies like a praying mantis.

Heavily-armored warriors in the ancient world were like tanks. Their armor sometimes weighed up to eighty pounds or more: no spear or sword was capable of cutting through it. But these man-tanks would suffocate within such a thick carapace, choking and dying as they breathed in nothing but hot air. In India, they would deploy elephants in the vanguard. These creatures, displaying the violence of wounded beasts, would plunge the battlefield into the kind of unimaginable chaos that defies all reason. The Macedonians would form tight lines of troops, with the men in back charging in with spears protected by the shield-bearing men in front of them. These spears were extremely



long—so long that, before the weapons of the enemies could hope to reach their targets, the outcome of the battle had already been decided.

As I have indicated above, man has, from ancient times, continued to wage wars. He fights like one plunged into a nightmare, like a lunatic or a beast. Men have possessed various weapons and used them to their advantage as they fought according to all kinds of intricate stratagems. But, despite the various ways men have fought throughout history, there is a mysterious consistency that ranks above these superficial differences in strategy. I am referring to how men fight on the *metaphysical level*: the idea of mental derangement, what man is only able to understand through instinct or his nerves. We *understand* this. And yet, we will never be able to give voice to this, just like animals who cannot form words with their tongues.

### **113. The Physiology Of History**

When a man begins to hold an interest in history, it is proof that senility has set in. This is true of individuals as it is of nations.

### **114. A Mirror's Reflection**

Whatever moral law a nation advocates, it will always be a prohibition of what comes most naturally to the people, an ideal born out of their flaws. Thus, one can discover a nation's true moral shortcomings—the actual character of a people—by seeing what morals are most sternly emphasized. This is what Nietzsche argues, and his

perspective is both wise and correct. For example, if we note what the Chinese emphasize most—the Confucian virtues like filial piety, humanity, and justice or the strict concern with order and cleanliness, we can surmise that the average Chinese person is selfish, greedy, and lustful. And in Japan, just think about what morals we stress most in our system of education, what we most strictly teach! The image in the mirror always displays the opposite of the truth.

### **115. On Listening To *Naniwabushi***

Western popular music (sans religious music) evolved through war. The trumpet and the drum mark the beginnings of Western music. Western wars pitted one nation against another, and all citizens' lives were similarly at stake—you could thus call war a "democratic" experience. Japan is exceptional in that wars were confined to the samurai class, nor has Japan undergone a foreign invasion. The average Japanese person is indifferent to war and consequently does not possess a patriotic spirit or a firm notion of "the nation."

Thus, one of the great achievements of the Meiji government was to instill patriotism among its lackadaisical citizenry through war songs and trumpet melodies.

Nevertheless, outside of the barracks most people still prefer the tranquil sound of *naniwabushi*. Suffused with the rustic charm of the pastoral, this kind of music does not mesh well with nationalism or the spirit of patriotism that the government attempts to inculcate people with. If the government wishes to wake the people from their peaceful

daydreams and instill them with a patriotic spirit, it will need to further tighten its martial laws.

### **116. The Japanese Spirit**

The "Japanese spirit" is much like the concept of "pure reason" in Kant's moral philosophy: it is quite unclear what it actually means or what moral qualities it encompasses. Nevertheless, the words "Japanese spirit" never fail to move Japanese people: the concept is assumed *a priori* and lies beyond reproach.

### **117. Culture and Bushidō**

The West's "code of the gentleman" is modern capitalism's reinterpretation of chivalry. In the West, citizens had a duty to serve their country's military, and, in order to fend off foreign invasions, they needed to quickly engage the enemy as a unified body. Consequently, the warrior spirit quickly spread among the common man. The heroic outcry for democratic rights and the abolishment of feudalism is the result of the people's stalwart, warrior-spirit.

Japan's tragedy is not that its feudalism lasted too long; rather, it is that feudalism's child—*bushidō*, or the warrior's code—never became widespread among the people. While Japan's samurai stood out worldwide for their pride in *bushidō*, Japan's citizens stood out worldwide for their utter lack of this spirit or any gentlemanly code, for that matter. Even Japan's capitalist revolution during the Meiji era stemmed from the

efforts of the former samurai class, not the commoners. What is most unfortunate in all this is that commoner art and literature of the Edo period have resulted in a widespread vulgarization of all Japanese culture, and we have gradually lost both the lofty spirit of aristocratic art as well as our romanticism.

### **118. The Shinpūren Rebellion: Consistency Is Tragic**

Doctors and soldiers were pioneers in the cultural enlightenment that led to a modernized Japan. At a time when the average person was still attached to his topknot or lamented his confiscated sword, progressive-minded soldiers began to wear fashionable French uniforms, dangle sabers from their waists, wore shoes instead of *geta*, used backpacks, and would march to the beat of drums and trumpets according to Western military drilling. This state of affairs is precisely what made the reactionary members of the Shinpūren Rebellion regard the members of the military as unpatriotic and warranting immediate execution. Before charging into the enemy garrison, however, the insurgents argued about what kind of weapons they should use. One group pointed out the disadvantages to engaging enemies with firearms in hand-to-hand combat. However, the use of foreign weapons in itself was a rejection of what the Shinpūren Rebellion stood for and was commensurate with capitulating to the enemy. Thus, they firmly rejected the use of firearms and, despite being well-aware of the disadvantages, chose to use katanas.

How tragic the men of the Shinpūren Rebellion were—precisely because of how consistent they were!

## **119. The Happiness of Artists**

Ever since taking up the study of history, I feel blessed to have been born a writer. I wonder just how many honorable and decent men have been branded as treacherous villains whose names will be criticized by future generations simply because they were on the losing side of a war. If the Russian generals who died loyally serving the Czar and their homeland knew what kind of treatment their corpses were now receiving at the hands of the Soviet government, no doubt they would bite their tongues one-hundred times over in chagrin at the futility of their loyalty. Kusunoki Masashige, who is now revered as a paragon of loyalty, was commonly regarded as a traitor before the Meiji Restoration. Artists, on the other hand—even those not recognized during their lifetimes—always receive objective criticism from future generations. Literary historians, for example, are usually objective and immune to the authority of others. Artists can thus rest easy and martyr themselves to a cause they believe in, counting on the judgment of posterity.

## **120. The Cruelty of Herbivores**

Japanese history never witnessed a tyrant of Nero's stature, nor was there the viciousness of ecclesiastical courts or the terror of bloody revolutions. In general, Japanese history is quite mild, and it seems like we never possessed the brutality of carnivores. But, anyone who has kept a rabbit for a pet knows that, though these herbivorous creatures lack fangs, they have their own malicious and crafty ways of

tormenting their enemies, even if these methods may superficially appear different from those of carnivores. Those familiar with Japan's history are well aware of just what methods Japan's leaders employed to govern our ancient ancestors. There were no crackpot tyrants among our bureaucrats and military leaders who would have made a show of feeding heretics to lions or feasting sumptuously while watching their own towns burn to the ground. They were commonsensical and crafty men, and they used more elaborate methods to torment the people, thus showing the same devious subtlety as an internal hemorrhage. This was particularly true of the Tokugawa shogunate: I am sure there have been few eras in world history as tyrannical as this, in which leaders snatched freedom from the people and atrocious oppression reigned supreme. Moreover, this oppression reflected the *herbivore's cruelty*: its enforcement was malicious and insidious.

None of the world's prisons have been furnished with jail cells as ghastly or abnormally cruel as those of Tokugawa Japan. This in turn is a fitting symbol of the Tokugawa administration—a symbol of the serpentine disingenuousness which bureaucrats displayed as well as the overwhelming oppression of the prefectural governors. There is no other time in Japanese history that evokes the cruelty of herbivores so much as the age of the Tokugawa.

### **121. Tokugawa Policemen**

There is no group of men as unpleasant or shameless as the policemen of the Tokugawa era. They would dispatch dozens of men to capture a single criminal. As he fled in terror, they would surround him at a distance, repeatedly shouting, "You're under

arrest!" (This was in order to psychologically exhaust him). As soon as the criminal started to escape, they would use cruel and vulgar methods like throwing sand into his eyes to stop him. They would wait for their victim to exhaust himself before finally closing in to arrest him.

The Tokugawa policemen were cowardly, vulgar, malicious, and demonstrated a venomous cruelty. They were truly emblematic of the Tokugawa shogunate: they symbolized insidious oppression and the caliginous cruelty of the police state. In fact, a Tokugawa policeman himself was like a personified form of the shogunate. Thus, people today are overjoyed whenever they see the protagonist cut down a Tokugawa policeman in the movies or on the stage. The Japanese, who endured so much cruelty for so long during the Tokugawa period, still contemplate revenge for a pent-up rage that knows no limits.

#### **Chapter 4: Poetry – Literature – Art – Genius – Writing**

##### **122. Artists and Masks**

Just like *nō* actors, artists possess a variety of masks that allow them to transform themselves: the mask of the clown, the mask of rage, the mask of serenity, the mask of pleasure. But, the fleshly face beneath the mask is but one, and its expression is one of eternal pathos.

### **123. Genius and Laziness**

"Hard work makes a genius"—or so common sense dictates. As a moral precept, it is true that "Hard works make a genius" plays a useful role in encouraging some students to be more diligent or in inspiring the incompetent. But, in reality, such words do not hold water. The following quote about genius is far more profound and in line with reality: "Laziness makes a genius." These words basically refer to the temperament of one who lives idly and refuses to do any kind of work outside of the time he spends doing what he truly loves. Nietzsche asserts the same in stronger words: "Tireless effort is a vulgar habit. If a person truly amounts to something, there is no particular need for him to accomplish anything." Lao-tzu also says the same thing: "To do nothing is to do everything."

"Laziness makes a genius"—we can call only one who understands the significance of these words a "true genius."

### **124. The Eagerness to Forget**

All gifted artists know the terror of the man teetering on the edge of a cliff. The most frightening thing is that one's first step will gain momentum and become an infinite number of steps, so that it becomes impossible to will oneself to stop. "Ah, this occupation will be the death of me!" Dostoyevsky lamented. "I will not think more than this!" Nietzsche swore to himself, feeling that he was on the verge of madness.



Thus, in horror of the first step, certain cowardly geniuses and those mindful of their health often deliberately avoid a path that leads to a cliff, as if eager to forget their art.

## **125. The Life of a Writer**

The life of a writer is the opposite of an average person's life. When people like government officials, businessmen, and other members of society put in their hours at the office, they are "working," and any time outside of this work is "rest." Among writers, this relationship of work to rest is reversed. A writer spends most of his time ceaselessly studying human existence and all its accompanying suffering. His life is ceaseless labor—a never-ending cycle of thought, feeling, anxiety, and sadness—that tortures his nerves. When a writer finally sits in front of his desk and picks up his pen, he is merely filing a report about this kind of daily existence. To a poet or a novelist, the time that he spends writing is the week's payday, the only day that he enjoys. Until he reaches payday, a writer's "work" is an agonizing straining of the nerves with no respite. There is no "rest" in a writer's life. Day and night, a writer is tired—he is *always* tired. Oh lord, grant us eternal repose—alcohol, opium, women! Permit alcohol, opium, and amnesia to writers alone.

## 126. Poe's Tricks

If you analyze the structure of any kind of art, you will always uncover some kind of aesthetic formula. On the other hand, it is impossible to produce any work of art according to a formula. No artist has ever created a work according to aesthetic or poetic standards, nor does he believe it is even possible to do so. Nevertheless, there are also some artists who possess the heart of a poet as well as the analytical mind of a scientist in unison. Artists like this sometimes attempt to explicate their artistic self by drawing upon the resources of their scientific self. Many geniuses, in particular, find it shameful to admit that their creations sprung from the flimsy underpinnings of adventitious inspiration, and they are consequently eager to recursively validate what foundations their works rest on.

Take Leonardo da Vinci, for example, who was an artist of genius as well as a consummate scientist. Even though he habitually carried ruler in hand while carefully devising the mathematical blueprints that underline his works, he was also able to paint the Mona Lisa's mysterious smile. Both da Vinci's disciples and appreciators were likely dumbfounded by the fact that such enigmatic art could be the result of precise mathematical formulas.

Edgar Allan Poe is another figure who doubled as poet and scientist. Even though he wrote that bizarre and hallucinatory poem "The Raven" thanks to the leaps of fantastic inspiration, he has also written about the scientific foundations underlying verse and the poetic imagination—and he analyzes "The Raven" in particular. It is almost as if he is trying to prove that he created his poetry through scientific and mathematic rules and that

art is born, on the contrary, from abstract thought. It is fascinating to see how Poe, like a conjurer or a magician, bewitches his readers through this miraculous amalgamation of art and science.

## **127. Aesthetics**

The most substantial part of an artistic work—the "content"—is constituted of, for example, morality, man's instincts, the workings of the mind, or the meaning of life. In philosophy, these topics fall under the fields of metaphysics, logic, and so on. Thus, besides the overwhelming presence of content, what little remains in aesthetics is "style." This is precisely why there is no field of study more desiccated and tedious in the world as the discussions of grammar that appear in the works of Aristotle.

## **128. On Seeing Coral**

First-rate poetry or prose is characterized by exceptional *naturalness*. The author, employing techniques not easily discernible at first glance, seems to conceal the complicated aesthetic structure underlying the verse as well as the subtle rhetorical figures at work. Thus, even when the content of the work is no longer relevant and the author's ideas seem out of fashion to future generations, the work preserves its beauty through its structure and thus lives on for a long time as a classical work.

## 129. Reflecting on Japan

Among the different ideas imported from the West to Japan, none of them—at least in the sphere of literature—has taken root even once. For example, when Japan imported eighteenth-century Romanticism, it stripped it of its underlying philosophical aspects (German dialectics and idealism), instead transforming it into traditionally weepy sentimentalism. Indeed, one could rename Japan's imported "romanticism" as "literature for young girls." On the other hand, nineteenth-century naturalism in Japan was only useful in fostering many affected, long-haired young men who so depressingly depicted life only to satisfy their own dandyism—a race of fops who were devoid of both skepticism as well as naturalism. When they realized the absurdity of their theatrics, they gave up on attempting to mimic *fin de siècle* skepticism and decadence, which they hardly understood in the first place. Consequently, Japan's naturalism reverted to its oriental origins: along with *haiku*, it dwelled in a world of elegant simplicity, refinement, resignation, and loneliness. This is today's so-called "psychological novel."

Since the beginning of the Meiji era, all Western ideas have ended up as rootless and fleeting fashions that have done nothing other than satisfy the cravings of young men for exoticism and foppishness. When the fever of fashion cools down, people inadvertently return to their country's native thought and traditions. Just as a man returning from a party quickly strips off his tuxedo for more comfortable clothes, Japanese literature inevitably ends up changing back into its *kimono*. What a French critic said after viewing a Japanese art exhibition is quite apt:

"In the past fifty years, Japan has learned nothing from Western culture; rather, Japan has only continued to deepen its appreciation of its own traditional culture."

### **130. A Picture of Japan's Westernization**

It is amusing to imagine, in the style of the artist who created "A Picture of Japan's Westernization" in the early years of the Meiji era, today's literary men in a more contemporary but similarly exotic scene. For example, "A Picture of Japan's Romanticism" would depict Omiya and Kan'ichi from Ozaki Kōyō's *Konjiki Yasha* discussing Hugo and Goethe while riding together in rickshaw. Or, in "A Picture of Japan's Naturalism," novelists like Shūsei and Katai—dressed in traditional Japanese clothes but wearing rubber shoes and bowler hats—would be dancing. Even though it would look superficially like one of Japan's traditional Obon dances, the artist would deliberately try to portray Japan's Westernization by making it similar to a dance from nineteenth-century Europe. Finally, in "A Picture of Contemporary Japan," the artist would depict our so-called "new" writers on a spring day, affectedly evincing themselves as "cultured men" as they show off their umbrellas and other clothes imported from the West. Next to them, those comical "modern girls" would be strolling along Ginza's brick roads, and Westerners would also pass by while laughing. Men of letters and painters of woodblock prints would stand alongside each other, equally earnest and triumphant in the belief that they are standing at the vanguard of Westernization and contemporary Japan's new culture.

### **131. A Mirror of the World?**

The Japanese are the most diligent people in the world, in addition to being a warlike people (on this point, we resemble the Germans).

The Japanese are an extremely realistic and pragmatic people (on this point, we resemble the English).

The Japanese are some of the most sensitive and refined people in the world (on this point, we relate to the French).

The Japanese surpass other nations in being both practical and democratic (this makes us similar to the Americans).

The Japanese possess a sanguine temperament, are strangers to rationality, and are easily excitable (this puts us in the same family as the Italians and the Spanish).

Basically, the Japanese share the same spiritual features of many other peoples. Whatever does not exist outside Japan does not exist in Japan; whatever does not exist in Japan does not exist outside Japan. As a people possessing the attributes of so many other peoples, are we a mirror that reflects the rest of the world? Or is that we do not even possess a fixed, concrete identity?

### **132. Prayer on the Mount**

Born poets and artists, when it comes to the task they are fated to fulfill, know well the pathos of Jesus' prayer: "My Father, if it is possible, may this bitter cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

### 133. The Gloominess of Literature

Among those active in the arts—painters, sculptors, actors, singers, pianists, dancers, and so on—the writer possesses the darkest and most melancholy disposition of them all. Painters and dancers, for example, are generally far more cheerful, bright, and outgoing. Why is this? Most arts involve *technique*, and consequently they require the continuous muscular movement of the hands, fingers, vocal cords, limbs, and so on. This kind of training inevitably leads the brain to create a particular kind of personality. To put it another way, the heart of the artist expresses itself externally as *movement*, and the will reveals itself through the rhythmic and athletic movement of the flesh. All rhythmic and athletic activities liberate and uplift the spirit.

In literature, on the other hand, there are no techniques that require muscular training: one's will is internally sealed. Literature only liberates the will on the mind's plane by relying solely on the written letters that reflect the writer's contemplations and flights of fantasy. There is psychology in literature, but no physiology; there is a world of symbols, but no physical movement. Consequently, the writer is just as gloomy as the philosopher: he languishes away, as if dark clouds have obstructed the lunar halo of his soul.

### **134. Literature and Physiology**

Aristotle uses the word "catharsis" (purifying or cleansing waste) when he describes the desire to create literature. One Japanese poet likened the composition of poetry to masturbation. Why is that people tend to use particularly vulgar and physiological comparisons like night soil to describe literature? Why do they not use different words to express the kind of imagery that would refer, for example, to the soul's liberation? Literature is devoid of flesh. Even though all the other arts—dance, sculpture, music—require the rhythmic movement of one's muscles to express themselves, literature alone sits in calm meditation. Existing purely in the recesses of the mind, it solely contemplates the cadence of phenomena. Literature possesses psychology but not physiology. Precisely because literature is devoid of flesh, it suffers unceasingly from the intense physiological gloom that arises from the contemplation of the body. This is why it is only in the realm of literature where people prefer to use explicit, physiological imagery—feces, urine, enemas—to express themselves.

### **135. Art for Art's Sake**

Those who create art for art's sake: *not* people who create works only when they feel intermittent outbursts of passion or fleeting inspiration and are otherwise oblivious to art; rather, those who are incessantly probing the recesses of their souls for new material, who continue to learn more about technique and style, who consume their entire lives in



their dedication to the study of art, who, basically, make their living through the production of art.

### **136. A Warning to Poets**

Artists—poets in particular—must not forget the origin of beauty: the poet must not forget that he himself is an instrument that plays pleasant music for an audience, nor how fragile and vulnerable beauty's delicate tuning is. Anything too radical or shocking is dangerous because it will shatter the instrument—thus, it is imperative to refrain from violent outbursts of emotion. In art, one must express all one's emotions within *harmony's* delineations. Poets must therefore at all times try to avoid unharmonious passions in their everyday lives. Intense fury, despair, hatred—avoid them all. It is these unpleasant emotions that mar a poet's cheerful disposition, turn his everyday life into a wasteland, and cruelly shatter the harmony of beauty that is supposed to underline poetry. However, *if* these kinds of feelings nevertheless still retain beauty's sweet harmony, then by all means, go ahead and ride the waves of agitation as far as you wish! Whether it is sweet sadness, profound depression, deep resentment, or the kind of lofty fury that soars through the heavens: take all of these emotions and cultivate them within your lives.

### **137. Poets and Music**

Suppose a poet creates a poem, and a musician turns it into a song. If the poem becomes famous through its musical adaptation, this is an embarrassment to the poet. In

true poetry, the words themselves possesses rhythm and melody, and there is no need to borrow musicality from somewhere else.

### **138. Poetry and the People**

The common people delight in poetry, as poetry appeals subjectively to one's emotions. On the other hand, the people are not so welcoming towards poetry's opposite: anything that is calm, objective, and realistic. They do not delight in prose. Despite this, true poetry—*literary* poetry—is incomprehensible to the common people. It is always lonely and impoverished. Ah, then again—what exactly is a "poem"?

### **139. A Poet's Legacy**

Poets are different from other writers, who stake their fame on the *volume* of their work: those who, during their lifetimes, write books spanning thousands of pages and leave behind glorious collected works that resemble mountains. What a poet leaves behind for future generations is a single work. Baudelaire, brilliant as he was, has left us only a single volume of poetry—*The Flowers of Evil*—as his "complete works." Poetry is pure gold, and one calculates its value solely through its *quality*.

#### **140. An Inversion of Cézanne's Argument**

What Cézanne took such pains to achieve was the elimination of "poetry" from painting—in other words, to restore art as *true* art to its proper position with regard to its idiosyncratic expression. The "poetic" painting of Gauguin and others was far too lyrical and dream-like, thus expressing the subservience of painting to poetry. Painting is *not* poetry, and fine art must exist solely as fine art.

In the realm of poetry as well, we must take (and continue to take) Cézanne's injunction to heart, for today's poetry is becoming too similar to painting. It seems like the futurists, cubists, surrealists and so on are all pursuing the various "isms" of the world of fine art, gradually turning poetry into figures and lines and thus making poetry subservient to the fine arts. The contemporary world of poetry demands its own Cézanne, who will invert Cézanne's assertion by applying it to poetry. Such a person will proclaim: "Let poetry free itself from the fine arts! Poetry is *not* painting. Poetry must exist solely as poetry."

#### **141. Romanticists and Realists**

Romanticists, looking out from the windows of their ordinary houses, harbor soaring dreams and the spirit of adventure—the kind that would allow them to fly into a strange, entirely different world. When everything is in its right place and in order, romanticists become overwhelmed by tedium. As a result, they flip over all the furniture in the house, eat meals on top of the bed, take naps on the kitchen table, put the cat within

a picture frame, or drag their muddy shoes around the house. They are always inebriated, they deliberately use incorrect grammar in favor of unique self-expression, and they shout in cacophonous voices.

Realists, on the other hand, beautifully and artistically depict the interiors of their houses *as they are*; they only try to find the deeper truth and meaning of the world within reality itself. For this purpose, the realists will regulate the lighting within each room by carefully positioning each lamp; they will adjust the folds in the curtains; they will arrange chairs into neat rows; and, to show their refinement and good taste, they will place flowers in the alcove. They use correct diction and grammar, and they make conversation that is clear, precise, and free from mistakes. They refuse to drink alcohol.

To the realists, who lead an existence that is elegant, graceful, and well ordered, those coarse, drunken romanticists who casually put their feet up on the sofa must seem unendurably barbaric. They are hooligans who lack manners and are oblivious to fine aesthetic taste. They are acrobats who shock people and delight in eccentric adventures. It may not be incorrect to say that the romanticists fall into the same category as hoodlums, rogues, and other such characters.

But, on the other hand, these romanticists whom we have just cursed may subsequently strike back at their enemies, the realists, with their own views. From the perspective of the romanticists, there is nothing more mediocre, tedious, overly commonsensical, and even vulgar as the lives of the realists. The realists proclaim that "reality" is a world in which one announces the precise time of the clock or where the furniture in the house is always in order; and they claim that this reality is beautiful. Thus, all romanticists wonder—who can be more tedious and submissive than this?

## **142. Vulgarly and Refinement**

Romanticism is, admittedly, coarse and devoid of elegance.

But, on the other hand, elegance itself elicits yawns of boredom. All romanticists begin their careers precisely because of their hostile, outspoken opposition to the overly academic elegance of classicism.

## **143. Poetry's Paradoxes**

Strictly speaking, "realists" exist only among poets and painters. Similarly, only poets and musicians can be true "romanticists." Novelists reside in a more mundane world that lies somewhere between reality and romance. Thus, novelists lack both the "untainted wildness" of the romanticists as well as the "pure elegance" of the realists, and the art they create lies in a world between these two extremes.

All good poets inherently possess *both* contradictory extremes: the pure elegance of the realists as well as the untainted wildness of the romanticists. The poetical world invariably exists as both a fictitious "dream" as well as a "reality" that comes closest to expressing deep truth. This is what explains why poetry can be the most eloquent and polished shape literature can take while simultaneously retaining its visceral, primeval wildness.

#### **144. Art and Isms**

There are no isms or rules in true art, only tendencies. Thus, what is romanticism? It is impossible to define it within the abstractions of a concept.

#### **145. The Exegesis of Nothingness**

Trying to substantiate the underlying logic of the various artistic "isms"—like the Marxists attempt—is no different from a monkey peeling the skin off of bamboo shoots. As one dissects an art, the art itself consequently loses whatever substance it possesses.

#### **146. Art and Progress**

Science, like a father's inheritance, passes from one generation to the next, and, as science progresses, it gradually reaps more and more profit. An artist, on the other hand, receives no patrimony. Even if he has inherited certain genes that influence his personality or disposition, this marks the extent of his "legacy": by no means will he receive any specific wealth that will in turn help him reap future rewards. In the line of art, a child takes the father's place and one generation replaces the next, but ultimately it is the *same* line of animals repeating an unchanging cycle. Thus, contemporary art is neither superior nor inferior to the art of ancient times. Twentieth-century science has, undoubtedly, progressed beyond nineteenth-century science. On the other hand, today's new literature is substantially inferior to that of the previous century—nor does

contemporary art come close to exceeding ancient Greek sculpture. Science *progresses*. In art, however, the difference between generations is no more than that of a mongrel whose fur or temperament differs from its ancestors. There is no "progress" in art. It merely exists in a state of dismal flux within the void, devoid of both hope and purpose.

#### **147. The Principle of the Saracens: Why Authors Avoid Reading**

A proud author always quakes in fear when he picks up someone else's book: "This book may already aptly express what I myself am thinking or what I want to say in my own work. Well then, I am better off not reading this book, as it may diminish my own confidence." On the other hand, a book whose contents do not reflect what you think and seems to occupy an altogether different world will not tempt a reader's interest in the slightest. Consequently, some authors never bother to read the works of other authors.

The Saracens torched the Ancient Library of Alexandria without compunction: "There are only two kinds of books here: those whose content already exists within the Quran and those whose content does not exist within the Quran. In the case of the former, their existence is redundant; and in the case of the latter, they are heretical texts that we should tear up and discard without delay."

#### **148. The Pathos of Comedians**

The fact that comedians must incessantly play the clown even when offstage—whether in front of the general public or house guests—is what elicits pathos. Mark

Twain, master of the comic novel, gained much popularity for his various blunders and eccentricities—deliberate acts which he constantly needed to contrive. This unfortunate writer had no time to rest besides the time he spent alone in his room. Or that melancholy man, Chaplin. Even though Chaplin was likely incessantly preoccupied with life's afflictions, in public he ended up inevitably acting as he did on screen: doffing his hat, waving his stick, and imitating a duck's waddling. His audience, overjoyed, would shower him with applause. But, inside Chaplin likely mourned and loathed hundreds of times over the profound sadness of being a comedian.

#### **149. A Demonstration of Romanticism**

To be born beautiful but die young, or to be born ugly but otherwise blessed by good fortune—which life would you choose? Someone once posed this as an exam question at a certain girls' school in America. Seventy percent chose the former. Judging from this, life's purpose is not happiness; rather, it is the attainment of beauty or another ideal.

#### **150. Performers and Artists**

What decisively separates performers and artists is the following point: among the former, the craft itself—technique—is *everything*, while true artists, on the other hand, use technique only as a means of expression. The ultimate goal of the artist is to grasp the



universal truths underlying the essence of nature and human existence. For the artist, technique is a means of expression, a mere tool to express the will.

Thus, in contrast to artists, performers are generally far more passionate about studying technique. An acrobat who specializes in crossing a tightrope on a bicycle must dedicate three hours out of his daily ten-hour regimen to master this one skill. A *rakugoka* may need to spend years alone in his room endlessly reciting in front of the wall to master a single comic story. It takes a *bunraku* performer eight long years of complete dedication to technique to learn how to deftly manipulate a single thread. Actors compel their children and apprentices to practice ceaselessly day and night, whipping them when necessary. Finally, pianists and violinists (who are also performers rather than artists) spend most of their time in interminable practice with their instruments.

Artists, on the other hand, are generally idle. The time a poet actually spends on a poem or an artist on a painting comprises a fraction of a lifetime. Thus, artists spend a good part of their lives on excursions, socializing, card games, entertainment, alcohol—loafing around, in other words. But artists, within this apparent idleness, are studying as well, though it is a different kind of study. Painters, who are true "artists," rarely take up the brush, for before they can do so they require a long period of preparation in which they attain some kind of *truth*. This so-called "preparation of the soul" is only possible through firsthand experience of life, and this is why artists spend their time drinking, travelling, or being "idle." A poet is tirelessly *experiencing* things: even if a poet ends up completing only a single volume of poetry within his lifetime, he nevertheless spends the entirety of his existence in tireless preparation for the poetry he has not yet written.

### **151. The Cheerfulness of Performers**

The cheerfulness of a performer is remarkable (is there anyone else who is so bright and full of energy?). The performer is in constant study. But this "study" is basically repetitive exercise—a training of the motor nerves that ultimately link to the cerebellum. The performer's enthusiasm makes him impervious to the various delusions that overstress the cerebrum and accelerate the depletion of one's energy. Without worrying or thinking unnecessarily, the performer is in constant good humor and becomes oblivious to human existence. The cheerfulness of the performer and the gloominess of the artist are like the contrast between day and night.

### **152. Vulgar Values**

The beauty of the waltz is vulgar. Consequently the waltz—just like the romance novel—will be perpetually good, and likely no one will ever tire of it.

### **153. Contemporary Poets**

If the romantic poets were knights and the symbolists were the intelligentsia, today's poets are the bourgeoisie.

The romantics clad themselves in silk and frill collars and dangled slender swords from their waists (this was their dandyism). They would kneel in front of their

sweethearts and solemnly pledge their love. Then, drawing their swords, they would go to battle with feudalism, oppressive government and other comparable foes. For the sake of justice and cultural liberty, they fought hard to stand at the vanguard of the revolution. They embodied Don Quixote.

The symbolists, so melancholy with their long hair and sable clothes that resembled mourning dress, would go about with weighty philosophical tomes in hand, and they were always sunk deep in skeptical thought (this was their own form of dandyism). Neither bourgeoisie nor aristocrats, they aired their powerless criticisms while suspended somewhere between feudalism and capitalism. Perpetual skeptics bereft of willpower, they embodied Hamlet.

Finally, today's poets show off their own contemporary dandyism: they don light and soft hats, dress in suits, unfailingly have a fountain pen tucked in their pockets like white-collar workers and businessmen, and wear wristwatches. They are immune to both romantic love as well as skepticism. Instead, they mechanically endeavor to make everything more businesslike. They embody the bourgeoisie.

Today, both Don Quixote and Hamlet are long dead. Valéry's famous declaration that "Poetry is mathematics" foreshadows our age's new credo: "Poetry is a businessman's abacus."

#### **154. The Fastidiousness of Poets**

The fastidiousness of poets frequently leads them to shun ardor.

### **155. Understanding a Poet**

A man without passion is no poet, and a man wanting in wisdom or insight is no artist. The poet himself is an artist. This is the clearest and most logical definition of the poet.

### **156. Poets and Evolution**

Poetry is the soaring of the spirit. It is *not* so-called "evolution," by which things gradually develop along a fixed course. Having thrown off the chains of causality, poetry always comes about according to the principles of chance. Poetry is not Darwinian naturalism, but spontaneous change—it is an utter repudiation of the concept of "evolution."

### **157. Tasteless Poetry**

The joy of poetic creation is to patiently search for the perfect meter with rhyming dictionary in hand. Respecting the solemnity of thirty-one syllables, the poet changes the grammatical particles and adds rhetorical flourishes as if manipulating pieces in a game of *go* or *shōgi*.

Ever since the advent of free verse, poets have lost this joy of creation. Poetry has devolved into farm labor—tasteless and dreary.

## 158. Literature and Technique

As a pianist, Beethoven was unlikely first-rate. The technique involved in deftly manipulating an instrument differs in nature from the talent required to put the music in one's head onto a score sheet. Of course Beethoven, in order to perform his own compositions, was no doubt more sensitive to the techniques of subtle piano-playing—pressing the keys more forcefully here, aiming to soften a certain section there, playing one section more smoothly, making another section more emotive, and so on—than most other pianists. But, these kind of techniques mainly demand the subtle manipulation of muscles that is only possible through training one's fingers. One masters such technique through tireless, mechanical repetition over a long period of time. The goal is well-developed reflexes, a kind of *technical* talent or facility. Thus, composers and performers naturally end up specializing in different areas.

On stage it is no different: director and actor share a similar relationship. The former pictures the entirety of the stage in his head, and he is well-acquainted with all the tricks behind production. However, he himself is unfamiliar with the actor's techniques, like properly declaiming lines or changing facial expressions. This kind of aptitude differs from what underlies the act of creation—one achieves it through the focused training of one's vocal cords and facial muscles. Architecture is similar, as the work is divided between the person who outlines the object and the person who actually constructs it.

Circumstances differ slightly in the case of sculpture and painting, as a single person must both plan and construct the object. For example, the sculptor intent on

creating a Venus from his imagination must himself take chisel in hand and manipulate plaster or marble. This kind of workmanship necessitates its own kind of practice and mastery of technique. Painters also need to tirelessly hone technique: the deft manipulation of brushes and paints, the proper drawing of lines or other figures, penmanship, and so on. Thus, the painter plays two roles: a creator with a certain abstract, mental picture in mind, as well as a technician who realizes that image through craft. The famous saying about Raphael—that he would still be an artist without arms—stems from this division of the artistic figure, as Raphael was a master of both artistic creation *and* technique.

Thus, all art inevitably possesses two sides. Dance, music, and so on are all inconceivable without technique. This "technique" is basically the mastery of skills that one attains through repetitive training of the muscles and nerves. However, literature is exceptional among the arts as it alone does not require technique. Literature does not have any aspects that necessitate the repetitive training of muscles. Of course, the creation of poetry and novels does not occur purely through passion or the mere desire to produce something. Like science, literature requires a unique knowledge of expression: one analyzes certain phenomena or emotions, contemplates them, deciphers them, and finally unites everything through the form of a sentence.

This is similar, in the case of music, to lining up musical symbols on a score and turning it all into a composition. This does not require technique, but purely creative ability. In literature, however, one does not need to *perform* the musical score on the piano, which constitutes the technical dimension of music. Purely creative ability is sufficient to create literature; technique is unnecessary. Literature is consequently the

rawest of the arts—in fact, it occupies a position that is furthest removed from the concept of "art" (perhaps this is why people refer to the fine arts and music as "pure art" and literature as "quasi-art." The phrase "literature and the arts" reveals this bias).

As I stated above, technique improves through practice. However, the nonexistence of technique in literature obviates the need for practice; consequently, there is also no such thing as "improvement" in literature. Most artists spend a long time practicing and improving their skills in drawing, sculpture, and so on: thus, they gain more and more success and eventually become masters *with age*. In contrast, it is irrelevant how many years poets and novelists spend writing. Although there may be occasional changes in a writer's style, there is no improvement—in fact, most writers tend to regress, as literature is the child of intermittent bursts of mental activity rather than that of technique honed through repetition. Of course, it is possible to enrich one's stores of mental energy through education and culture. However, no amount of cultural knowledge will ultimately be of much use in the actual process of creation. Literature lacks technique, and thus there is no improvement through increased skill.

### **159. A Poet's Bed**

Lyric poetry's pathos lies in *rest*. Since a poet spends his life in agony because of hunger or dissatisfaction, a prey to irritation and violent emotion, he achieves peace only through rest. It is for the selfsame reason that the poet delights in lyric poetry.

## **160. Emotion and the Stomach**

Physiologically speaking, anger is an expression of hunger. Hunger is what grants carnivores the power to leap at and kill their prey. Without hunger's accompanying emotions, carnivores would lose the will to fight and consequently starve to death. On the other hand, sadness is an expression of satiety. Sadness is what underlies a satiated creature's digestion—and it is from the pleasure of satiety that tears flow from the eyes of a lion snoozing in the sun and dreaming its melancholy dreams.

## **161. A Lesson from the Shooting Range**

At a shooting range, most people tend to aim for the exact center of the target. However, a slight deviation occurs when one actually pulls the trigger: a slight trembling of the shoulders or hands is all that is necessary to throw one off target. Writing is the same. An inexperienced writer, consumed by some idea, tends to aim for the center. However, he goes off course as he soon as he picks up the pen: he ends up shooting stray bullets whether through rhetorical flourishes or the imprecision of his ideas. The trick is to straighten your posture and not tremble when you fire, and, just like a gun, the secret lies in aiming a little above or a little below the target.



## **162. Feigning Ignorance**

One sly oratorical technique is to deliberately feign ignorance despite being knowledgeable about something. Even a philosopher like Kant—a paragon of honesty and integrity—seems to occasionally feign ignorance in his arguments, thus shamelessly fending off potential criticism. This is even more obvious in a dogmatist like Marx, who deliberately cloaks what he knows so well in ambiguity while obstinately forcing his own bold ideology forward. And even some of the heroes who stood at the forefront of the Meiji Restoration in Japan: despite knowing the impossibility of expelling all foreigners, they deliberately pretended not to know that and insisted on kicking them all out.

It is not uncommon for many sagacious thinkers to possess one more face: that of the fool.

## **163. Versification and Swordsmanship**

The secret to writing poetry is no different from that of fencing. When you gain momentum or see a chance, you must strike at the enemy without delay. What is important is the readiness to throw away your life if necessary under your opponent's blade. You must not hesitate, nor be preoccupied with your own vulnerability or cowardly go on the defensive. To apply this to poetry: you must neither put on airs nor be bashful and, in particular, you must not be overly sensitive to aesthetics. Forget posture: charge forward wildly, close your eyes and leap in. If you reflect or become self-conscious for even a split-second, your art will die beneath the blade of your foe.

#### **164. The Delusion of Self-Confidence**

"He wrote exactly what I was thinking of writing!" The confidence that you could have written a similar work had the author not beat you to it compounds your frustration. However, until you actually read the captivating work in question, the fact is that you formerly did *not* consciously think about the same themes, ideas, or expressions as the author. You only become aware of "what I was thinking of writing" precisely through this author that you so resent.

#### **165. Undying Passions**

Something that possesses the passions of a human being but no flesh and blood. Thus, something that is undying, indestructible, for all eternity. This is a "celestial being" in Buddhism or an "angel" (including the fallen ones, like Lucifer) in Christianity. And the true form of an angel is art.

#### **166. A Bookcase's Secrets**

A writer who shows his bookcase, by revealing the wellspring of his ideas (the authors he has read and been influenced by), is like a dimwitted magician who decides to explain the secrets behind his tricks to the audience and consequently spoils any interest

in the show. A savvy writer will never show his bookcase. Or, if he does, he will be the kind of cunning fellow who deliberately arrays all the books that he would *never* read.

### **167. Beauty**

Beauty has no flesh. Thus, everything that is beautiful—music, poetry, certain landscapes—is, along with romantic love, tragic. Beauty is nostalgia for a flesh beyond its reach.

### **168. The Classicism of Novelty**

Novelty is like a nihilistic bombshell launched at beauty. At the same time, novelty attempts to construct its own fortress of beauty to protect itself. Thus, unlike real-life combat, novelty in art simultaneously annihilates and builds—it launches its bombs while erecting its own edifice of beauty. Consequently, all novelty is in fact classicism.

### **169. Illusions on the Battlefield**

I want to write poetry gloomier than machine gun bullets, more depressing than a downed balloon, crueler than an exploding grenade, more brooding than poison gas, paler than illumination flares, more romantic than cannon fire, lonelier than a smoke screen—poetry that glimmers whiter than gunfire!

### **170. On the Obscurity of a Genius**

There is no point in a eulogy for an artist of genius that pines over the fact that he never earned popularity during his lifetime. The fame of an artist is not necessarily commensurate with his happiness. When people contemplate the obscurity of a genius's life, they recall that a certain human being was born in a particular age, failed to adapt to his society, culture, and environment, and ultimately died a miserable and lonely death. This is *not* sympathy for his artistic obscurity; rather, it is sympathy for the blandness of the everyday life that characterizes a man born out of season.

### **171. The Tragedy of Poets**

The tragedy of poets is that they must wait—day after day, sometimes even year after year—while fervently praying for inspiration that may never come. They are like Japan's famous dog, Hachikō, who died in front of a train station while waiting in vain for an owner who would never return. The lives of most poets may even be more tragic than this.

### **172. An Author Without Contradictions**

An author without contradictions is like a man without a shadow. He gives no appearance of being alive: he is an empty and tedious ghost that wanders about sustaining

himself solely through ideas and isms. You should not bother to speak to a man with no contradictions, just as you should not bother to read an author without contradictions.

### **173. The Self-Denial of the Genius**

A genius's pride will make him feel slighted if called a genius. To possess "genius"—inborn ability—is like becoming rich through one's patrimony: the acquirement of riches through good fortune rather than personal merit.

Thus, the genius insists that his success is the result of unremitting hard work and effort rather than that of coincidence. Rodin, in response to someone who asked how he was able to create such brilliant and wondrous works of art, said, "There is no such thing as genius. Genius is merely the result of study. It is method. It is perpetual planning."

### **174. Anarchism**

As a political movement, anarchism is long dead. To be more precise, the anarchists fulfilled their avant-garde task, and they entrusted the key that unlocks their utopian vision to a far-off future. Political anarchism is no more. But, the *spirit* of anarchism—that everywhere all people are free, that each person is an independent entity that will never be subject to another's dominion—will always live on. The anarchic spirit—the pledge to combat one's evil nature, to struggle on until justice is won—has existed since the beginning of the world, and this spirit continues to flow through literature and all the other arts. This is not only a contemporary issue: it will exist in the

future as well, so long as humanity exists. The mission of anarchism, along with the arts, is eternal.

### **175. The Justice of the Weak**

The weakest among the weak—those incompetent human beings who will never find a way to provide for themselves in society—have but a single method to boldly assert their right to exist: art.

Consequently, art possesses a socialist sensibility at its core.

### **176. Disciples and Epigones**

Do not confuse a disciple with an epigone! While the latter is a mere slavish imitator, the disciple is the master's *successor*: he has absorbed the ancient blood of the master, and this combines with his own blood to create something different and new. Consequently, a disciple founds his own style in opposition to his former master, as if he is establishing a new country that is hostile to the motherland. Nevertheless, the master loves the ungrateful disciple who curses him more than the loyal but slavish epigone, as if the former were a healthy child and the latter a miscarriage.

### **177. The Philosophy of Poets**

The philosophy of a poet that lacks even the slightest traces of dogmatism—is it worth anything?

### **178. The Wisdom of Poets**

Poets must always be rational—not wise.

### **179. Sentimentalists**

The most sentimental human being consistently doubles as the most utilitarian human being. The character of the Japanese people, the personality of the average housewife, and the writer of popular novels who earns his fame by moving the masses to tears—all of these substantiate this fact by their very nature.

### **180. Dilettantism**

Dilettantism alleviates the sloppiness of lust, and it lends a soothing harmony to the savagery of the passions. Accordingly, literature requires dilettantism.

### **181. Truth in Literature**

"Truth" in literature does not lead to eschewing lies altogether. Rather, it refers to depicting the relentless passions of human nature, which in turn engenders, contrary to expectation, falsehoods and fabrications. A literature bereft even of lies—what significance could it possibly have?

### **182. Charm in Literature**

Charm is not only necessary to performers, but to writers as well. Not a deliberately obsequious kind of charm—rather, the kind of charm that humors the reader by bringing out the shortcomings of human nature: its cowardice, its contradictions, and its earnestness that surpasses mere naivety.

### **183. The Triumph of Fine Art**

Fine art possesses substance, and it possesses the means to extend itself to new kinds of matter. Consequently, today—a *materialistic* age in which poetry and most other arts are falling out of favor—fine art is still alive and well: it proudly struts about in its role as the foremost art of our civilization.



#### 184. Shiki's Good Fortune

Masaoka Shiki: imagine if a man of such tremendous energy—so ambitious and eager for fame—had *not* been confined to his sickbed for life? Most likely he would have actively participated in society, whether as a politician, a businessman, or a member of some social movement. Sickness, however, incapacitated him, and impelled his devotion to the world of literature. But, far from descending into incoherence because of his condition, he ended up accomplishing incredible feats as a writer.

#### 185. Art's Value

Art is leisure. Hence, those without leisure have no need for art—or so a certain utilitarian philosopher argues. However, human nature turns this argument on its head, for there is no one as eager to attain leisure as a man lacking it. Once they satisfy their immediate needs, the impoverished and the famished feel a deep need to submerge themselves in extravagance. Art itself is one kind of extravagance.

Hence, art's true devotees are not the rich, the happy, and others snoozing in their rocking chairs; rather, it is those *unblessed* by leisure, who remain poverty-stricken and apprehensive for the duration of their lives. The former, already habituated to extravagance's ensuing satiety, are indifferent to art. Aside from a casual dilettantism, they have no particularly strong enthusiasm for it.

## 186. Literary Men and their World

What a king criticizes changes from day to day depending on his mood. If his breakfast happens to be delicious, affairs of state are proceeding smoothly, and his favorite mistress sparkles in her makeup, he will shower the musicians who play before him with the highest praise. However, if, the following evening, the king's mood sours, the same musicians will receive such harsh criticism that they may fear for their lives.

The criticism of a king is not an objective appraisal. It is a subjective judgment contingent on a certain set of physiological as well as psychological factors—his "feelings," to put it simply. Consequently, a court's poets and musicians must, of necessity, form alliances with everyone else in the court: the cooks, the servants, the doctors, the beauticians, and, especially, his personal attendants and maids. For it is they that influence the king's mood from day to day, and they constantly need to sound out his intentions.

Hence, a court's artists do not lead independent existences. They comprise one part of an organic whole that also includes the king's meals, how well he sleeps, his health, the mood of his mistress, the political outlook, and so on. In today's literary establishment, where for-profit journalism dominates, the situation is identical to that of the king's court. An artistic work that delights a magazine's editors and proves its worth in the literary establishment: whether it is a philosophical work that becomes sensational owing to its novelty, a critique that becomes a common topic of conversation in literary circles, or a nationalistic novel that appeals to the conservatism of the masses—*everything* depends on a whole array of conditions involving the economy, politics, and

the newspapers. Literature is not hermetic: it is a single part of a large economic system dominated by journalism. Accordingly, someone who wishes to succeed in the literary establishment and become a "man of letters" must be cunning enough to consistently read the newspapers, keep an eye on the latest sensations, monitor the fluctuations of stock prices, and note any political developments. The "pure" artists—those who refuse to form alliances with the court's attendants and cooks—will not only be friendless; they will look on as others quickly snatch away beneath their feet whatever position they may occupy.

### **187. Poets and Observation**

Scientists observe; philosophers meditate. The novelist is the scientist of literature. He takes an interest in each individual human being, makes inferences based on his observations, and attempts to understand the human soul—that which all human beings share. The poet, on the other hand, like the philosopher, does not see each individual human being. He is drawn only to the essential; he shows an interest only in the universal. Thus, just like the philosopher, there is no need for the poet to observe. Even Valéry claims that, whether strolling through the woods or the city, he has never "observed" the individual things that surround him. To the contrary, the first-rate poet must understand much more through *intuition*.

### **188. Novelists and Observation**

To observe is show an objective interest in unearthing the foibles and idiosyncrasies of human beings. The novelist, due to the nature of his occupation, is constantly observing others without even being conscious of doing so. Hence the novelist occasionally strikes others as cold-hearted, even cruel.

### **189. Poetry of the Future**

In the world of poetry, "novelty" has already become clichéd. People become accustomed to all the newest turns of phrase; ultimately, as they become indifferent to even the most violent vocabulary, what was once stimulating fails to stimulate, and novelty ultimately loses its allure (thus, novelty itself becomes a source of boredom). In the poetry of the future, people will return to the purity of the classics in order to cleanse today's poetry of its violence and chaos. Rather than pursuing ever-newer excitements, they will unearth the fundamental beauty that lies at the heart of the poetic spirit.

### **190. A Literary Crossword**

The latest trend in our so-called "new poetry" is to carelessly take a group of words and rearrange them in such a manner that they strike the reader as a kind of crossword puzzle. The interest of this kind of playful literature lies in finding the key to the puzzle. Failure to do so makes the whole work seem like meaningless nonsense. Then

again, successfully solving the puzzle is to see through the magician's sleight of hand. This in turn makes the work seem even more ridiculous, exposing it as the piece of meaningless triviality that it is.

### **191. Literary Politicians**

In the world of art, one must differentiate "works" and "isms." For example, I do not agree with Marxism's view of literature. However, I see no reason to categorically deny artistic works under the Marxist label. Art remains independent from this kind of quibbling, and it necessitates a different mode of appreciation and criticism.

Nor is it different in the world of ideas. One must distinguish a thinker's conclusion from the process he took to reach such a conclusion. For example, although I do not see eye to eye with Tolstoy's views of life or art, I nevertheless maintain a deep interest in and feel a strong attraction to his essays. The worth of an idea does not lie in its conclusion: rather, it stems from the logic, the method, the dialectical process, and ultimately the life and unique suffering of the individual that led him to such a conclusion.

I have always denied literary *isms*, while nevertheless affirming the value of all literary *works*. Thus, in my understanding of art, both "denial" and "affirmation" live side by side—nor is this a contradiction. Most artists likely think along these lines. They love the individuality and the life of a certain writer, or they love his specific works and his ideas. On the other hand, artists have no love for men who align themselves into factions based on abstract and arbitrary conclusions deriving from various isms or doctrines. The bonds artists share differ from the bonds that unite one politician with another. All that is

necessary to chain one politician to another is for them to both assert the same principles. Even if two politicians differ in personality or temperament, even if their worldviews stand on opposite poles, and even if, as individuals, they are utterly incompatible, they will still consider themselves allies merely if they share the same political views. The distinction between enemy and ally is unambiguous among politicians.

The mindset of the artist differs from this political mindset. The true artist holds neither absolute friends nor absolute allies. He invariably exists as a single, individual unit and a man of independence. Some political writers—so-called "literary politicians"—are poisoning the world of literature through their ignorance.

## **192. Commonsensical Men and Artists**

The thinking of commonsensical men and artists differ in that men of commonsense always think about specific circumstances at specific times. For example, parents attempt to give their children the kind of wholesome education that will position them to be members of their particular society. This is the mindset of commonsensical parents. In the same way, commonsensical soldiers think about how to create the world's strongest army and navy, as this will determine who dominates the world in their particular age. Politicians make provisional plans based on what the present situation demands. Revolutionaries attempt to save contemporary society by fanning conflict between different segments of society, like commoners and the aristocracy.

In this world, the artist alone thinks differently. The mindset of the artist is to always transcend the specific in favor of contemplating the universal, to ponder eternal

problems instead of contemporary ones. The reason that children who aspire to be writers feel antagonistic toward the practical education their parents impose on them is that these children idealize the universal and eternal man over the man of contemporary society. To the artist, soldiers, politicians, businessmen and socialists are all philistines: they are mere *men of the present* who remain limited by their commonsense. The artist scoffs at such a narrow-minded worldview. It is too utilitarian, and art holds no utilitarian value—for what is utilitarian is not universal. In the end, the "society" that artists idealize is no more than a state of anarchy. Hence commonsensical men tend to treat all artists as dangerous.

### **193. The Horizon of Commonsense**

Art edifies by lifting the veil of commonsense. Or perhaps it does not. In the first place, commonsense does not enter the sphere of art. Nevertheless, that which does not even reach the level of common sense merely exists beneath art's horizon. In the same way that the genius and the idiot differ, the man with excessive commonsense and the man bereft of it are equally dissimilar. At any rate, I wrote this "commonsensical" warning particularly for the benefit of the latter.

### **194. Simple People**

"Simple" people do not exist. All human beings are equally complicated. The epithet "simple" refers to a paucity of self-reflection—in other words, it is a criticism of

someone's ability to *perceive* the character or relevant circumstances of himself or others. One does not use "simple" to describe a personality, but to refer to *ignorance* (an absence of intelligence).

### **195. On Conflict with One's Teachers**

What agitates many writers and artists is their inability to completely break free from the influence of their teachers or other brilliant people that they look up to. This stems from the admonition that one must not, under any circumstances, quarrel with one's masters or attempt to surpass them.

Those artists who ended up making a name for themselves were able to demonstrate their unique abilities to the fullest as well as make ample use of their strong points. Consequently, it is troubling for them to see someone follow the same path, compete with them, and ultimately attempt to overtake them. Of course, even if someone "overtakes" his seniors, he may end up as a mere imitator who slavishly followed the same path.

My advice in this situation is to relinquish your competitive spirit as well as resign yourself to the fact that you will never be your teacher's "equal." When you next compare yourself to your teacher, observe carefully: on which specific points are you inferior or do you find yourself unable to match him? Once you are able to properly criticize yourself, you will not only break free from being a slavish imitator of your predecessors, you may even end up victorious and surpass them. The reason underlying this is that, in the arts, one's strong points are always one's weak points, and one's weak



points are always one's strong points. When you find it impossible to equal your teacher in some ways, your teacher will find it impossible to equal you in other ways. A man with a long sword does not know the advantage of a dagger, and the man with a dagger does not know the advantage of a long sword. When you contend with your predecessors, it is important to both know your own insignificance as well as to give up on following the exact same course.

### **196. Beauty and Its Instruments**

All innate artists inevitably have a tendency to take flight. The reason is that they fear degenerating into a vulgar and tedious "man of the world"—the result of both seeing the beautiful melody of one's spirit worn down by unendurable circumstances and fate as well as losing the soul's harmony (beauty is always commensurate with harmony). So if a fire or a riot breaks out, who has the right to call the musician who takes his precious instrument and flees a "coward"? To brand an artist a "fugitive" is not abuse, but praise.

### **197. The Transient and the Immutable**

What changes over time is *taste*. The essence of poetry itself is eternal as it is immutable. When you see an alteration in taste, do not misconstrue it as a change in poetry's fundamental spirit.

## 198. The Future of Literature

"Reading" is a task that necessitates a considerable amount of effort. A man must, by dint of effort, make the medium of printed symbols comprehensible to his brain and eventually arrange them in such a way so that they form logical thoughts. In comparison, "seeing" and "listening" are far simpler, as they directly stimulate the senses and produce understanding with little to no effort.

These days, people are consuming so much of their brain power through their jobs that they find the task of reading even more irritating. This explains why people today tend to welcome music and the fine arts while keeping literature at arm's length. Movies, in particular, have usurped literature's position. Newspapers alone continue to hold the attention of readers in our age. However, even newspaper editors are beginning to regard the act of reading as a vexation, and visual images are gradually supplanting print. Today's most practical businessmen usually opt to listen to the radio instead of reading the papers in an attempt to conserve time and mental energy. Recently, one American audaciously claimed that he foresaw the perfection of television and that, in the near-future, newspapers themselves would go extinct since they were already antiquated in our own age. If this is true of newspapers, the writing of literature must be a truly antediluvian practice.

So what is to become of literature in the future? Although it will not die out all together, it will likely lose its universal appeal and popularity. Like science and other scholarly disciplines, it will retreat to a quiet and secluded room of the library, making

itself available only to an elite minority of readers. Consequently, the quality of literature itself may very well improve.

### **199. The Vanity of Poetry**

Today's poets, born into an age of prose, have already lost poetry's spirit. What is regrettable is that they themselves nevertheless maintain the ambition to be poets and to compose poetry, and they insist that the new kind of prosaic literature they are creating is in fact the poetry of the age. Hence these new "poets" are attempting to redefine poetry, to put what is originally conceived of as prose in the position of prosody. Simply put, they are eager to use clever rhetoric to make non-poetry seem like poetry. However, even if their sophistry bears fruit, they have nothing to gain. From the perspective of the reader, they simply reinforce the loneliness of an age devoid of poetry.

### **200. In Response to Slanderers**

By directly citing certain conclusions in my philosophy, people tend to label me a dogmatist. However, when I carefully write out the evidence corroborating these conclusions, people call me a man of common sense. From the moment Socrates opened his mouth, people called him a purveyor of crazy ideas. However, when others later grasped what he was trying to say, people called Socrates a commonsensical man as well. There are also stories about primitive peoples who were initially enchanted by the wonders of scientific discoveries, as if it were all magic—but, once they heard the

explanations behind it all, they were disappointed and became even contemptuous of science. A truth, once comprehensible, becomes banal, another piece of common sense that anyone is acquainted with.

## **201. My Great Teachers**

Dostoyevsky is like an all-enveloping darkness. Nietzsche is a Babel Tower that stretches up into the firmament. Poe is a bottomless abyss. These three are miracles in the world, true geniuses that surpass all human limits. In comparison to these terrifying figures, Baudelaire strikes one as being far more mortal, a practical spirit that feels much closer to us. Goethe is not only a great litterateur, but an ocean that encompasses all things. Schopenhauer possesses the spirit of truly captivating music. Lao-tzu, who sprung from Chinese soil, is like nature's mountainous peaks. Eternal spirits dwell alongside him in the valleys of his meditations, and they all gaze together at the cosmos in their dreams.

I have learned everything from these teachers.

## **202. The Childishness of Poets**

A significant amount of childishness always resides in a poet's personality. Even when a poet seems to be getting along in age, he seems unique owing to a certain immaturity in his personality—a kind of remarkable childishness. In comparison, a novelist seems quite mature. Even a youthful novelist seems far more adult-like in his cool composure. In light of this, perhaps the poet suffers from an inability to grow up.

### **203. Critics**

Artists produce nothing, as they do no more than criticize human existence. Then, there are men who in turn criticize these critics, but who nevertheless do not manage to produce any art. Critics—they are like an aristocracy of sterility.

Oh, how lonely critics must be!

### **204. Belated Regrets (Final Words)**

What I have finally realized, so late, is that my entire literary education was fundamentally a lie. Japan's Meiji-era literary establishment urged me to do one thing alone: obey the West in everything. They commanded me to kick out any antiquated or traditional conceptions of literature that I inherently possessed. This literary injunction went by different names: sometimes Naturalism, Russian literature, or Tolstoyism; at other times, Epicureanism, Aestheticism, Individualism, Satanism, or Romanticism. Naive as I was, I blindly obeyed these literary directives. And, precisely because I took them to heart, the literary establishment shut me out, and I became a distant outsider in the world of Japanese letters. The various isms of foreign literature could not prevail against the inherent Japanese spirit and thus they failed to take root in Japan's literature.

I finally realized that one cannot cultivate on Japan's soil what does not agree with Japan's climate. If that happens to be the case, why did my teachers instruct me as they did? In fact, the very literary world that educated me in this way later turned its back on

me, laughed at me, and did not deign to show the slightest interest in the misfortune of its loyal pupil. Being naive, I was utterly taken in by them all. It is precisely this that is so frustrating to me.

But!—But what about now? Driven to this point, just where do I go from here? My literary future is pitch-black; I see nothing in it but falsehood and skepticism. My regrets—they come too late!

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